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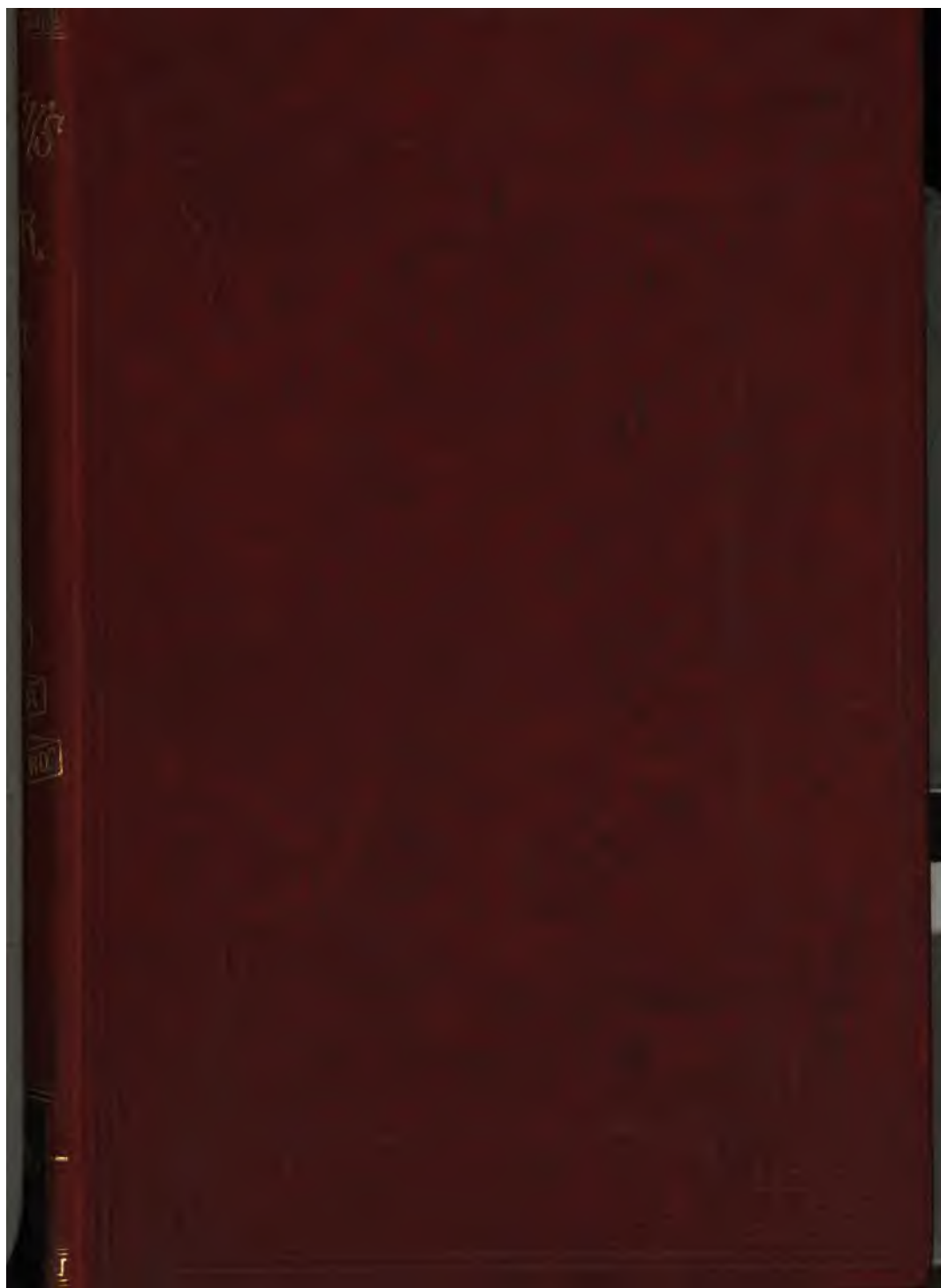
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BENTINCK'S TUTOR,
ONE OF THE FAMILY.

A Nobel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON: SAMPSON LOW, SON, & MARSTON,
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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.



	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
A TÊTE-À-TÊTE	1
CHAPTER II.	
FRANK AND CONFIDENTIAL	13
CHAPTER III.	
UNDER THE MUD	26
CHAPTER IV.	
UP THE SCREENS	40
CHAPTER V.	
VALENTINE AND ORSON	58

CHAPTER VI.

MR. WOODFORD GIVES A BIT OF ADVICE . . .	70
--	----

CHAPTER VII.

EVELYN'S TROUBLES	85
-----------------------------	----

CHAPTER VIII.

TUTOR AND PUPIL	105
---------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. MURPHY'S LETTER OF THANKS . . .	120
--------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER X.

THE MANAGER'S SECRET	133
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI.

NEWS OF WAR	152
-----------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII.

THE LIGHT IN THE CHURCHYARD . . .	166
-----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO CASES OF BROW-AGUE	182
----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIV.

THE "SEVEN SISTERS"	200
-------------------------------	-----

CONTENTS.

V

PAGE

CHAPTER XV.

MORE TROUBLE 224

CHAPTER XVI.

UNDER THE FELL 236

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW THE NEWS WAS RECEIVED AT THE HALL . 254

CHAPTER XVIII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE 261

CHAPTER XIX.

SELINA'S HOUR OF TRIUMPH 274

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION 296

BENTINCK'S TUTOR.

CHAPTER I.

A TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

BEFORE Androcles had finished his sitting there came to him a message, delivered through the keyhole—for Woody valued his personal safety too highly to venture bodily into the sanctuary—which astonished that classic character almost as much as the magnanimity of the lion had surprised his prototype.

“Ma sends her compliments to Mr. Blake, and would he be so kind as to stay for a family-dinner?”

“*What!*” screamed Claude, rushing to the door, and dragging his offspring in by the collar before he could make his escape. “How

dare you play such tricks upon my friends ? I'll teach you to make a gentleman an April fool a week after date. Say it again, sir, and I'll shake your head off."

With this incentive to iteration before his eyes, it was not likely that Master Woodford would repeat his invitation in so many words.

"You needn't believe it," whined he in an abject tone : "it's nothing to me whether the gentleman stops or not. But that's what ma told me to say ; and I saw her going to the cupboard for plums to put in the suet-pudding, and turning up the bottle of whisky, to see whether there was enough for two ; and she said there was, if you would only take as much as was good for you."

Here Valentine Blake hastened to interfere, lest condign punishment should be inflicted upon the artless youth, and bade him convey his respectful compliments to his mother, and the assurance that he would gladly stay to dinner ; a message, by-the-by, which was delivered in the following fashion : "All right, ma. I told you so ; the model jumped at it."

But Mr. Murphy had entertained no idea of

chastising his son. Once assured of the reality of the invitation from his wife, Claude had no thought for anything but that stupendous fact. "Blake," gasped he, as soon as they were left alone, "you're a good-looking fellow, but I could not have believed that Apollo himself would have achieved such a conquest. The wife of Socrates should be above suspicion, but it is clear that Selina is enamoured of you. Don't consider the philosopher, I beg ; perhaps you may be even able to do him a good turn, by putting in a word about a latch-key. Dinner ! why, nobody has been asked to dine here since my bachelor-days. Shade of Epicurus, there will be pickled onions with the cold beef ! But Blake, Blake !" — here Mr. Murphy's voice sank to quite sepulchral tones — "beware of the wine called Port, which will be set upon the table after dinner. If it is a fresh bottle, it will be of that vintage imported from Afric's sunny strand at four-and-twenty shillings, bottles included ; if it is a half-bottle, I *know* of an earwig that met his death in *that* at least three weeks ago. As for the whisky, however, there is plenty of it down here,

which Selina knows nothing about. See"—Mr. Murphy disclosed a cupboard furnished with a false front of palettes and small pictures, behind which reposed several samples of Kinahan—"see how the wind (and likewise the cold water) is tempered to the shorn lamb!"

But Mr. Murphy was not destined to enjoy the evening with his new friend in the convivial manner he had reckoned upon. The dinner, however, which, to Mr. Blake, who had been accustomed to campaigning, seemed a very tolerable repast, went off with complete success, except for a perilous jest of Claude's, who, when the cold beef appeared, observed to his guest: "There are just a pair of canvas-backed ducks, and you see your dinner."

"There are nothing of the sort," broke in Mrs. Murphy indignantly.

"It's a matter of opinion, my dear," returned the painter airily. "I was referring to my little pictures of *L'Allegro* and *Penseroso* on the wall yonder: very pretty girls, and generally accounted to be a pair of canvas-backed——"

"A *little* decorum, if you please, Mr. Murphy," broke in Selina.—"Allow me to recommend you, Mr. Blake—since my husband forgets everything except his ill-timed jokes—to try a little of that Port wine. I should apologise for its having been opened, but you will find it none the worse for that: it is a wine that has got a great deal of body in it."

"It *had*, until she fished it out with her knitting-needles," murmured the incorrigible Claude.

But quite as much to the surprise of his host as of his hostess, Valentine Blake replied with thanks that he took neither wine nor spirits—a circumstance in itself peculiar, but the result of which was absolutely unprecedented, for when Mrs. Murphy rose to depart, and Claude, with energetic politeness, sprang to the door to let her out, she expressed herself as follows: "Since you do not indulge in fermented liquors, Mr. Blake, and my husband is never content without his glass of spirits and water after dinner, this seems as good an opportunity as any for our having a little private talk together upon a matter which affects our

common interests. I daresay you would not object to give me half an hour of your society in the drawing-room."

Mr. Blake bowed profoundly. Claude Murphy's bright brown eyes opened to their fullest extent, and his lips emitted a long low whistle. Master Woodford, who was wallowing in the dessert, hastily wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and prepared to migrate to the drawing-room, for secrets were even dearer to him than preserved ginger.

"No, Woody," said she, "you will keep your father company; and if I catch you listening at the door I'll box your ears."

Ground-floor and first-floor, in one and the same dwelling-house, surely never held a more ill-assorted pair apiece, than did that dining-room and back drawing-room in Rhadegund Street upon the evening in question; the one containing Claude and his cub, the other Selina Murphy and her guest Valentine Blake. Between the former couple there was little enough of talk; Claude sipped his whisky and water, smiling to himself at the ludicrous behaviour of Xantippe, or regarding Master

Woody with half-shut derisive eyes, as that young gentleman roved from preserved ginger to damson cheese, like a horse which finds for the first time both bean-chest and corn-bin with their lids open.

"How very, very sick you'll be, Woody!" was all the remonstrance that passed the parental lips.

"Yes, pa," replied the obsequious youth, helping himself to the last dregs of the last sweetmeat.

"You'll say it's me, of course, when your mother asks what has become of the dessert."

"Thank you, pa, I will," was the unexpectedly literal reply.

A very different sort of conversation was that which was going on above-stairs.

"Mr. Valentine Blake," said Selina, as soon as she had closed the back drawing-room door, "I am well aware that my conduct must seem exceedingly strange, and to demand considerable explanation. My excuse must be, that in the matter about which I wish to speak with you—of vast importance in itself both to you and to me—there is not a day to be lost.

And yet, before I begin to explain myself, I require to be certified of the sort of man with whom I am about to deal. I do not ask for your history. I care not from whence you sprang, or in what you have been engaged; but I wish to hear from your own lips whether you possess the qualifications necessary for my purpose—which will, I promise you, if carried out, be greatly to your own advantage. You have been a soldier, Mr. Blake; but are you a brave man? You have had soldiers under you; but have you a will of iron, so that when you say: ‘Obey me,’ it is sure to be done?”

“Madam,” returned Valentine Blake gravely, “as to my courage, it is not becoming in me to speak of that; but I have been the close companion through years of battle with the Bravest Man in the World. As to my will, it has never failed to be obeyed when I have had authority for its enforcement, notwithstanding that I have often had to deal with desperate and lawless men.”

“Ah!” remarked Selina with significance, “perhaps you yourself and the law were not always upon the same side?”

"I was always upon the side of Right, madam," replied the stranger calmly, "which seems to me to be the highest law."

"Very good, sir ; I meant no offence. It is upon the side of right"—here her cold eyes kindled, and her thin fingers closed together tightly—"that I require you now to serve. It may be, at a future time, I shall need your aid to redress a wrong."

"So far, madam," observed Valentine Blake simply, "I think I may say that I have qualifications for the task you propose for me."

"You are friendless too, you tell me, sir," continued Selina thoughtfully, "and have no relatives with whom to gossip about other people's business through the post. That is also well."

The stranger smiled.

"I mean, it is well for the prosecution of the matter that I have in my mind," explained his hostess quite unabashed. "In business matters all sentiment is out of place ; and I honestly tell you that I am glad that you are a lonely man. If you were one like my husband, hand-in-glove with every specious fellow

you came across, and 'hail-fellow-well-met' with every babbling drinker, you would not suit my plans. I daresay, if need were, now, you could keep a secret?"

"The lives of scores and scores of valiant men have more than once been preserved by my silence, madam, when the thumbscrew and the scourge in vain invited me to speak."

"I can believe it, sir," replied Selina with enforced admiration. "You are one, I do not doubt, to stick to your colours; it is for that reason that I have chosen you to wear mine."

Valentine Blake bowed stiffly. "Madam, I have yet to learn the nature of the service you would impose upon me; except at sea we rarely act under sealed orders."

"And you are very poor," continued Selina musing, and without noticing his last remark. "That is well too. You would fain persuade me that you are honest also.—Nay, sir, I do not question it: where honesty and self-interest pull the same way there is no need to do so. You will get nothing by betraying me: you will indeed have nothing to

betray ; whereas, by being true, you will gain much."

"I shall be true, madam, never fear," observed the stranger gravely. "But you have not yet mentioned the nature of the occupation."

"Let me first point out its advantages," resumed his hostess quietly. "In the first place, you will gain your livelihood: you will have board and lodging and an ample income. That is something, is it not?"

"It is a great deal, madam, indeed. Forgive me, however, if I anticipate your proposition. I conclude that you are about to honour me with the offer of the post of tutor to your son. I regret to say I cannot accept that post. I do not intend to stay in town for any length of time."

"My son does not need a tutor, sir, his education being perfected," returned Selina starchy; "and the situation which I am about to suggest for your acceptance is in the country—three hundred miles from London. You said that you had no objection to a private tutorship; you said that you could teach the

rudiments of a commercial education. I am about to take you at your word. Now, look at this." She pulled out from her pocket a newspaper, folded down so as to mark a particular advertisement, and placed it in his hands :

WANTED—*a Resident Tutor for a Young Gentleman (ætat 17) of wayward habits, and whose education has been neglected. No person without decided capabilities for the office need apply. Some knowledge of commercial routine indispensable. Address Herbert Warton, Esq., Sandal-thwaite, Cumberland.*

CHAPTER II.

FRANK AND CONFIDENTIAL.

WHILE Valentine Blake was making himself acquainted with the advertisement, which he did with considerable deliberation, Mrs. Murphy rose from her seat and paced the room, not from impatience of the delay, for she never even looked towards her companion, but for the sake of that relief which motion always seems to afford to the mind overcrowded with thoughts.

“Have you read it?” asked she at last, not stopping even then, although she threw one sharp glance at his face—“have you read it, and do you understand it?”

“Yes, madam,” returned the young man slowly. “The paper is the *Commercial Times*,

I see : a strange journal enough to find in an artist's drawing-room."

"What is that to *you*?" replied Selina sharply, and coming to a sudden halt. "However, if you want reasons, you shall have them. *I*—not my husband, mark me, but myself—I take that newspaper because it sometimes treats of matters in which I have a personal interest. It refers to property, now passed from me and mine, but which I once had reason to look upon as my own. It also often mentions by name a certain blood-relation."

"With whom, to use your own expressive words, perhaps you do not gossip through the post," returned the young man smiling.

"You are very right, sir," answered Mrs. Murphy coldly. "The person I refer to and myself are far from being upon good terms—he is my brother."

"The Mr. Herbert Warton here referred to, I suppose?"

"No. I have every reason to believe, however—indeed, I am positively certain—that the advertisement in question emanates from a member of my family; from my brother,

perhaps, or, as is more likely"—here her features were contorted with a little spasm, and she jerked her words out one by one, as though each went nigh to choke her—"from my sister-in-law. Mr. Warton is a friend of theirs, and very likely to be their adviser; but he has no children of his own." Once more Mrs. Murphy resumed her walk, and this time with her fingers playing with her bare and wrinkled throat, in a very unattractive manner indeed.

"Look you, Mr. Blake," said she, when she stopped again; "I hate my brother, and I hate his wife, but I do not hate their child. I bear no malice to the lad whatever: why should I? True, he is the innocent cause that I and mine are poor instead of rich; that my Woodford is heir to his father's beggary instead of his uncle's wealth; but you and I, sir, wage no war against the innocent—nay, we wage no war at all. The message which you will bear is wholly one of peace."

"Madam," returned the young man quietly, "without quite seeing, I confess, how the matter is to be brought about through the

mediation of so humble an individual as myself, and a total stranger to all concerned, yet, if my services should prove the means of reconciling you to a brother, of healing an unnatural feud——”

“I should curse you, sir,” interposed Selina with energy, “to my dying day. Let us be frank with one another throughout this matter. I never wish to think of Ernest Woodford otherwise than as the base and perfidious rogue I know him to be: I never wish to think of the woman he has twice taken to be his wife *at all*. But with regard to their son—my nephew—the case, as I have said, is different. You, who have no relatives, sir, may not be able to appreciate the saying that ‘Blood is thicker than water,’ but for my part I own, this spoiled, unhappy child—whom I have never seen, but the account of whose misdeeds has often reached my ears—awakens in me the deepest interest.”

Ashamed, perhaps, of the gentle emotions that might be observable in her features, Mrs. Murphy set her face to the window, and turned her back upon her companion as she pro-

ceeded: "'Of wayward habits,' sir, says that advertisement; alas, the truth is, that this young man, the only relative now left me in the world, except my Woodford, is vicious and abandoned to the last degree. Without some such help as you can give him is speedily afforded, his ruin is certain; and the vast means of which he will be the possessor will be the cause of innumerable evils to others as well as to himself. I know what sort of a bringing-up the poor lad must needs have had, and my heart has no room to spare for censure; pity for his present, and apprehension for his future, is all I feel. Do I make my motives intelligible to you Mr. Blake?"

"Yes, indeed, madam," returned the young man gravely; "though such disinterestedness is rare. But how can you be sure that this appointment is not filled up, or that, if vacant, it will be given to one who has only your recommendation to back him?"

"It is not filled up, because the advertisement appeared in yesterday's paper for the first time, and in this journal only. It is so like my brother not to use the ordinary

channels. You will find him wedded to commerce—and better for him if he had taken no other wife. Short-sighted, yet scheming fool!—What was I saying? Ah, the tutorship. You have credentials, testimonials of some sort, I conclude?—Good. Those and your priority of application will without doubt secure the post. Only, whatever you do, whether now or hereafter, see that you never breathe my name, or hint at having known me or my husband. To do so—no matter how sure you may deem your footing—would be to leave Dewbank Hall forthwith. There is a girl there, by-the-by—a woman she must be by this time—about whom I should put you on your guard. Are you weak, Mr. Valentine Blake, with respect to young-lady dolls?—I am sorry to see you blush: I should have thought you had been above such follies.”

“If I blush, madam, it is for another reason than that which your words imply. However charming this young lady may turn out on acquaintance, my affections are pre-engaged.”

“I am glad of it,” replied Mrs. Murphy

sharply ; “though she was not charming when I knew her, nor did she give any promise of being so. She was, however, a bold and obstinate child, likely enough to grow up both dangerous and designing.”

For the first time throughout their talk there came into Valentine Blake’s eyes a cold-blue gleam like the glitter of a sword.

“Is this young lady, too, a kinswoman of yours, madam ?”

“Yes, sir.—You would say, perhaps, that I am unfortunate in my relatives. It was open to the girl I speak of to take her uncle’s part or mine in the subject of our quarrel, and she preferred to take her uncle’s.”

“Forgive me, madam, if I seem to push my curiosity too far, but it is my habit—induced, perhaps, by military training—to endeavour to make myself acquainted with the ground when venturing into a strange country. May I ask what *was* the subject of your quarrel ?”

“There were many subjects, sir : whatever arose we differed about, but the chief cause was an insolent, vexatious boy. He is dead now, so there is no need to speak of him.”

"And was that young gentleman a relation of yours also, madam?"

"Yes, sir.—You may smile, but I am not ashamed to say I loathed them all. I strove to do my duty by them, and I earned distrust—defiance! And I am not one to be defied without resenting it.—Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, madam. The more you tell me of these occurrences the more I am astonished, not at your indignation, but at the unselfish interest you manifest in your unknown nephew: it seems as though the pent-up flood of natural affection, so often turned back from these unworthy channels, was seeking for its outlet in that neglected lad."

"Very likely," observed Selina drily. "I have certainly no ill-will against the young man—Bentinck he is named, I believe, after some connection of his mother—nay, as I have said, I wish him well. I am doing the very best for him I can, Mr. Blake, when I ask you to consent to be his tutor."

The young man bowed with courteous gravity, but uttered no reply.

"You accept the compliment, but not the place," observed Selina sharply.

"I did not say that, madam ; but it struck me that you had not quite finished what you had to say—that you might have some condition to add, in case I should accept your offer."

"I have mentioned that of secrecy," returned Selina thoughtfully. "It is understood that nobody shall know that I recommended you for the situation."

"Nobody but your husband, madam ; I am under some obligation to his kindness, and it is imperative that I should be frank with him in the matter."

"And are you not under some obligation to *me*?" replied Mrs. Murphy with irritation. "Don't I give you the place? And can't I take it away from you again—that is, could not I find means to let my brother know that you obtained it through my intervention?—Come, I don't wish to threaten you, Mr. Blake. Let us be friends, by all means. But why should you acquaint my husband with this matter?"

"Because, madam, even if he had not

shown himself my friend, I could not consent to share a secret with his wife unknown to him."

"If you tell Mr. Murphy, you may just as well tell all the world, sir. However, since you are so obstinate about it, you must have your way. It would be well to answer the advertisement to-night, so that your letter may leave town by the first post to-morrow morning."

"Very well, madam; so let it be. Then there is absolutely no other condition?"

"None, sir; for what I have now to ask can scarcely be called by any such name—it is simply this: I shall require to hear from you at intervals a detailed account of all that takes place at Dewbank Hall."

"Madam, whenever we caught a spy at Monte Video," returned the young man, "it was our custom to hang him."

"You did quite right," assented Mrs. Murphy cheerfully. "You surely cannot imagine that I wish to put such an indignity on you as that at which you hint. I have no means of learning the state of affairs in a

house that was once my home ; I have had no information for nearly twenty years of how things have been going on at Sandalthwaite ; I have never even set eyes upon this lad Bentinck Woodford, in whom, as you say, I feel so lively an interest—is it then to be wondered at that I wish to seize this opportunity to learn something of all these things ? Indeed, I am not concerned with what may be going on at present, or with what may happen in future at Dewbank Hall, half so much as with the past. I should like, above all things, to hear from you the occurrences which have taken place there during my absence—especially shall I welcome anything you may have to tell me about Bentinck. You may even dwell upon his personal appearance ; let me know if he resembles his mother or his father, or anybody else in the parish, for I know everybody at Sandalthwaite, and shall understand a likeness of that sort better than any mere description : and I should like to know something about the man who inserts this advertisement—Dr. Herbert Warton. I don't mind telling you, Mr. Blake, that he

was once a would-be flame of mine. I daresay over his liquor—for I am sorry to say he is not so abstemious as you are—he will boast to you of the opportunity which he once had of making what would have been for him quite a splendid alliance; don't contradict him, pray. Encourage him, rather, for my sake, for he is the greatest gossip in all Cumberland, and will tell you more of what I want to know than a whole file of county papers. It may be weak and foolish to wish to be acquainted with such matters, but then I am a Woman, Mr. Blake. I demand no breach of confidence; no spy-work, such as you naturally revolt against—do I?" And Selina Murphy regarded her companion with a look uncommonly like those enticing ones with which she used to favour Claude in the day of her courtship of that victim, allowance only being made for the lapse of years. The enraptured cockatoo was moulting: Selina was getting a little bald.

"Really, Mrs. Murphy, I do not see how I can resist you further," replied Valentine Blake with gravity. "There can, as you say, be no harm in what you request of me; a

London newspaper editor might ask as much of his country correspondent."

"Just so," replied Selina eagerly; "and he would also remunerate you for your trouble. Your remark relieves me from some embarrassment upon that score." She fumbled in her pocket for a moment, to separate a single five-pound note from a little packet of them which she had held in readiness there from the first. It was as though Marsyas should have been compelled to peel off his own epidermis, but she did at last detach the outside bank-note, which she held up (as a niggardly uncle might proffer a cheap sweetmeat to a child) before the young man's astonished eyes. "You must allow me to offer you this retaining-fee," said she, "and then I shall be sure you will never advocate the other side."

"Madam," returned Valentine Blake stiffly, "I am no lawyer, but a soldier who takes his pay (when he can get it), but does not stoop to plunder. Believe me, I shall do my duty both to you and to my employers without a bribe."

CHAPTER III.

UNDER THE MUD.

WHEN Valentine Blake, in accordance with his expressed intention, informed Claude, over their cigars in the studio, of the subject of that *tête-à-tête* in the drawing-room, and of how he had determined to apply for the post which Mrs. Murphy had been so good as to put in his way, the painter's countenance assumed an unwonted seriousness. "Wants you to be tutor to young Bentinck, does she? My dear Blake, I should have been less surprised if Selina had made love to you—less surprised, and I had almost said better pleased; for, depend upon it, she has some crooked design in her mind. As for her solicitude to prevent this lad from growing

up a scamp, that's rubbish. Why doesn't she take precautions in that way for her own Woody? I am sure he needs them. Pooh, pooh! Besides, between ourselves, Blake, my wife is not such an unruffled dove under disappointment as that comes to; she's a deal more like the fretful porcupine. Is it likely that she should feel this tender interest in one who has been the cause of her own child losing his inheritance?"

"The innocent cause," observed Blake quietly.

"Yes, yes; that's all very well; but his innocence is not the feature of his character which presents itself most obtrusively to Selina. I tell you, she hates the whole pack of them down at Sandalthwaite; and since she had it in her mind to supply this young fellow with a tutor, I must say I am glad she has pitched upon you. I honestly confess, Blake, that if she had chosen a man of whom I entertained a less high opinion I should have been uncomfortable: had she chosen a scoundrel"—here Claude cast a cautious glance towards the door, and sank his voice to a whisper—"I would

have written to Woodford myself to put him on his guard."

"Against what, in Heaven's name?" inquired the other.

"By Jove! that's just what I don't know," ejaculated Claude with vehemence. "I should have told him to 'look out,' that's all. It's my opinion, where her 'Woody' is concerned—of course, this is quite between ourselves—that Selina would stick at nothing. Her brother and she were never very cordial, and her marriage with your humble servant brought matters to a crisis. When her son and heir, as she called him, was born, she wrote the most aggravating letter to Woodford, who had been separated from his wife for years, and the consequence was—for I am sure he would never have done it except from pique—they came together again. Selina is secretly aware that it is her own act which has indirectly deprived her son of the reversion of a great estate. Do you think that makes her more resigned to its loss, Mr. Blake? If you do, you are unacquainted with human nature. Now, I am not a learned man, nor a business

man, nor a man whose opinion you would ask in a case of conscience, perhaps, but I know men and women well. The knowledge has been thrown away upon me, it is true, so far as practical results go. I'm an indolent fellow, and like my ease; but if I chose to lay myself out to please society (which my wife is always harping about), I could cut out all the solemn sulky swells in Christendom. I know the laws of gravity, sir, though I don't choose to obey them.—Where was I? Oh—— What I was about to say was this, that although I let the world go by me as it will, I look uncommonly hard at the passengers. Nothing makes much impression on me, in a general way, but I shall never forget—never—my wife's face when she opened Ernest Woodford's letter, in yonder breakfast-room, seventeen years ago, announcing this young Bentinck's birth. I will not depress you by alluding to the tigress robbed of her young, and, besides, that venerable metaphor would utterly fail to convey an idea of her expression of countenance. But if ever a woman 'looked snakes,' and *meant them*, that was the case with Selina Murphy. I tell you,

sir, if the bending her little finger had been necessary to preserve from destruction her brother and sister-in-law, not to mention their new-born offspring, she would have had splints fitted on, such as a Chinawoman applies to her nails, and kept it stiff all the days of her life. I didn't like it *then*," concluded Mr. Murphy with energy; "and when I think of it in connection with her suggestion of this tutorship, I do not like it *now*."

For a moment or two Valentine Blake pulled hard at his cigar in silence, then quietly answered: "It was very natural that Mrs. Murphy should feel disappointed. I suppose she did not send her congratulations to Mr. Woodford?"

"You are treating this matter much too lightly, Blake," returned Claude with irritation. "I have put myself out about it—a thing I have not done about any circumstance (except when she wanted to deprive me of my tobacco) for these eighteen years—so, pray, do not underrate the prodigy. It will not occur again, mind you; so make the most of it. Congratulate him! Sir, she never wrote a line

to him or his wife; *and she has never spoken one word upon the subject from that day to this*—I don't say to me, for that's nothing, but even to her charming son. Do you suppose that this doesn't mean mischief? If you do, I have again to tell you that you are unacquainted with human nature, and, in particular, that you know nothing about Selina Murphy."

It was curious to contrast the energetic volubility of the ordinary easy-going and Epicurean painter, with the quiet and drily humorous tone of his companion's reply. It would really seem as though the two men had exchanged their respective temperaments.

"Do you suppose that your wife wants me to murder Master Bentinck?" asked Valentine Blake.

"Well, no: of course not. That's perfectly ridiculous, you know. She ain't a Lady Macbeth; though, if I could get her to sit for *that*, with Ernest Woodford's letter in her hand, I should catch just the right expression for the character."

"I assure you, Mr. Murphy," observed the young man smiling, "that there was nothing

in your wife's looks while she was talking to *me* that betrayed any sanguinary purpose. She looked somewhat embarrassed, indeed, from the first, but that may easily be accounted for (and, indeed, she herself hinted at the reason) by the awkwardness she felt at being about to offer me the money——”

“She offered you *money*?” gasped Claude, pale as a sheet. “Selina Murphy offered you money?”

“Yes: by-the-by, I forgot to tell you that she wanted to press a bank-note upon me.—Why, what's the matter, my friend?”

“I don't know, Blake: Heaven only does know. Look here: I saw you for the first time six hours ago, and this woman has been my wife for twenty years. If I am doing wrong in talking to you thus openly, God forgive me. But I fear——”

“Stop!” interposed the other imperatively. “Do not say anything for which you may be hereafter sorry. Whatever you have spoken to me—whatever suspicion you may have hinted—is a secret between us two. But there is no need for any such talk. Mrs. Murphy

requested me to keep her informed of what is going on at Dewbank Hall, and, simply from a misconception of my character, imagined that a bribe would render me more zealous. That is the simple explanation of—of——”

“The phenomenon,” observed Claude, with a ghastly imitation of his old manner. “She has never given me a five-pound note in her life—never. Well, I should have liked to have seen her making the offer to you. With what contending emotions must she have been torn! What a study for the cold chisel! What a personification would she have made of that tender subject, Parting!”

“I assure you, Mr. Murphy, that you are now taking the proper view of the matter,” observed the other earnestly. “I am certain that your wife meant her relatives no harm by sending me among them; nor, on the other hand, did she play the hypocrite, for the portrait which she drew of each can be scarcely flattering. You, of course, have seen the originals?”

“I know Woodford well,” returned the painter, “but not his wife. I did not even

know he had a wife at the time when I was courting Selina up in Lakeland.—That is the district for young love, sir. Nature smiles upon it—except when it rains; poets have hallowed every square inch of it. There is one line of Wordsworth's where he speaks of the choice of a wife, in which I used to think at that time (and I'm sure of it now) that he hit off Mrs. Murphy to a nicety :

A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food.

If she has a blemish, indeed, it lies quite in the other direction; and her brother was of the same opinion."

"And you did not like Ernest Woodford?" observed Mr. Blake, dexterously taking advantage of the recurrence of name to arrest Claude in his tirade.

"Like him?—no, man. There was nothing to like in him. He was a mere human money-bag, very strongly stitched. His first conversation with me, and his last, and I believe all the intervening ones, was about money. Money was tight, he used to say: everybody

was selling out. 'I am investing, sir; but then,' added he in consequential tones, 'I am the Individual, and not the General Public.' Thank Heaven for that, thought I; but it would not have done to have said it, for Ernest Woodford is no fool. He makes the slight mistake, indeed, of imagining himself to be a sagacious man: and, above all things, he prides himself upon having no enthusiasms; so beware, my dear Blake, how you broach your peculiar patriotic theories. Nay, the fellow has not even a prejudice—except one, by-the-by, and that is against all Irishmen. Fortunately, you have not much of a brogue, but what you have I recommend you to stifle."

"You don't paint my future employer in rose-colour, Mr. Murphy. But your wife was mentioning some other folks I should meet with at Dewbank Hall. There was a Dr. Warton, for instance—the man who puts in the advertisement."

"Ah! you will find him a clever fellow, and an agreeable relief from the Black Squire, if drink has not by this time drowned his wits; but besides him, upon my life, I know nobody

you'll have to speak to. Mr. Wilson, the parson, is a very good creature, I believe, but not having been taught the Cumberland dialect in my youth I was never much edified by his company. Then there's little Evy—by-the-by, she is big Evy now—Miss Evelyn Sefton, my wife's niece; and if it was not simply impossible to foresee to what a child may grow up, I should say you would find hers the pleasantest face you ever set eyes on. Yes, I have very little doubt that Evy's beautiful, but I'll lay my life that Evy's good. A marvellous child, sir, that was; wise far beyond her years; exquisite and graceful in all her ways; and with a tenderness of heart that would do honour to an angel. Ah! if Providence had given *me* such a daughter, Mr. Blake, she would have made this howling wilderness here a smiling garden; she would have taken Woody himself in hand, and moulded him into some resemblance of the Human; she would have given an object in life to me—— Yes, I know I've got one already, but I don't mean that sort of object. I'd have worked my fingers off for such a child as that; and every

ten-pound note which I could have saved for her would have given me greater pleasure than I now feel in spending it—and I am very fond of spending money, Mr. Blake.”

“This Miss Evelyn must indeed have been a wonder as a child,” observed the other drily. “How is it, being a woman, that she has not met with a husband?”

“Well, thereby hangs a curious story,” returned the painter. “I see you are getting a little tired of my enthusiasm; but the fact is, not only did this girl endear herself to me (as she did to everybody who knew her and was able to appreciate her worth), but I had the misfortune to do her an involuntary wrong, which still more softens me towards her. Ernest Woodford had a nephew—Charles—a fine, bold, open-hearted lad, who naturally felt impatient of the restraints of such a home as that at Sandalthwaite; and when his uncle asked my opinion of what should be done with him, my recommendation was to let him see the world. I did not mean exile, with half the globe placed between the poor young fellow and his friends; but his uncle, wishing to get rid of him, since

the boy's nature shamed his own by contrast, as I fancy, affected to take me at my word, and so Charles was sent abroad—and died there : he was drowned in Rio harbour.”

Claude Murphy's rich voice grew quite hoarse ; and it took some time, and a deep draught of whisky and water, to reinstate it in its proper key.

“ Well, you may smile,” continued he, “ but, I believe, child as she was, that Evy was in love with him ; not the boy with *her*, you know, of course, although he used to call her his ‘ little wife.’ At all events, when the news came of his death, you might have thought the child had been really left a widow. I have been told it was the saddest thing to see the change wrought in that young creature. There was but little passionate grief, such as one would have expected, but a shadow fell on her young life which has darkened it ever since. Perhaps I am wrong in this opinion ; perhaps the young woman would have married long ago, had she had any suitable offer, which, it is likely enough, has been wanting at Sandalthwaite ; but my belief is what I have stated.

When you become her cousin's tutor you will have an opportunity of judging Evy Sefton for yourself."

"Yes," returned Valentine Blake thoughtfully; "and whatever I find her, I shall, at all events, remember that she once inspired Claude Murphy with genuine affection and respect."

"A man that knows men and women well, sir," observed the painter, pulling up his shirt-collar.

"A man that has a sound heart, sir, which is better," returned his bearded friend, reaching his hand across the table to grasp Claude's.

"Well, upon my life, I don't know, Blake," answered his host, shaking his head doubtfully, while griping the proffered fingers with great cordiality. "Most times, I think I am a most awful scamp; but sometimes I do entertain the hope that there may be some good bottom under the mud."

CHAPTER IV.

UP THE SCREES.

"THE road seems to wind here a great deal, my man," observed Valentine Blake to the driver of the vehicle that was conveying him from the railway station to out-of-the-way Sandalthwaite. "Is there no short-cut over the hills?"

"Short-cut? Yes, there be, straight over Blackbarrow yonder, but thou'lt not find it a nearer road, I war'n."

"Well, I'll try," returned the other, leaping out of the vehicle just as though it had been standing still, before the man could stop his horses. "If I get 'to the top of the hill I suppose I shall catch sight of the house?"

"Ay, if thou get there, thou wilt. But

thou maun luik out for the peat-moss; and there's kind o' screes to climb, where thou'lt rive thy cleighs, I war'n. And the top of the Fell ain't allus where it luiks 'to be, thou'lt find."

"A [very true observation, my man, which applies to other things than hills," replied Blake smiling; "but I am used to rough travel, and to find my way in a strange country with less of direction than you have given me; so I will take my chance. Your horses will much prefer my room to my company, I am sure; and don't hurry the poor beasts, for if they take my luggage to Dewbank Hall at a foot's pace it will get there in time enough."

"A merciful man is merciful to his beast," says the Scripture; but mercy to hired horses argues a much higher degree of benevolence; at all events, it evidenced as much to the honest Cumberland driver, who jogged on well pleased enough with his lightened load, and muttering to himself: "A guid lad, a guid lad; but a fule tu that walks when he can ride."

Unconscious of this depreciating remark,

Valentine Blake sprang up the hillside until the carriage had turned a bend of the road and was hidden from view; then he sat down, bareheaded, and surveyed the way by which he had come with pensive eyes. He had seen many grander sights than winding Blennerdale—with its broad bright stream filling up half the narrow valley, and its gray rocks mellowing in the April sunshine—but none more fair. There was not a house within view, nor even a shepherd's hut; nothing witnessed of man's hand save the long white straggling line which was the road, and the circle of great stones by the river's brink, which marked where the sheep-washing took place in its season; yet the peaceful spot looked very livable and homelike, and especially to the eyes of this wanderer in many lands. It seemed to him that he could never tire of watching the cloud-shadows chasing one another along the mountain walls, new tapestried by the careful Spring with green, nor of listening to the pleasant babble of the stream, as it stopped to argue here and there among the crisping eddies, or, after whispering softest

nothings to the sedgy marge, ran down the smooth reaches with a silver laugh. There was a strong temptation within him to draw out his tobacco-pouch, and deliver up his

Spirit wholly

To the influence of mild-minded melancholy;

but he drew out his watch instead, and found that he must needs push on if he would reach Dewbank Hall at the time at which Mr. Woodford had written to say he should expect to see him at dinner. Valentine Blake therefore arose, though not without a sigh, and, with his long firm strides, soon gained the ridge of upland, where the mountain breeze began to fan his forehead, and the weight of thought that sat there to dissolve beneath its influence, like snow in sunlight. There is nothing like the mountain air for drowning care—mountain-dew cannot compare with it for a moment; and then the sights upon that highest of highways are enough to warm the heart of an intending suicide, and make it in love with Life. With every footfall one comes upon some new beauty, which has been placed there, perhaps

(who knows?), especially for ourselves; which, at all events, it is a thousand to one that no other human eye has lit upon: some mossy chamber in a nook, known only to the honey-bee that sings there; some crystal pool that has reflected nought save the tender blue-bells that droop over it; some tuft of heather, islanded in quaking mould, of a hue and perfume that take captive two senses at once, while a third is rapt by the hurrying notes of the unseen songster of the clouds. But presently began quite another sort of natural beauties—the Screes, of which our wayfarer had been warned. These were simply a loose mass of shingle, sloping down very abruptly to a mountain-tarn, but the colours of which vied with the rainbow. Valentine could see them shining far before him, more like some allegorical obstacle in the *Pilgrim's Progress* than the reality of rocks and stones which they appeared as he drew nearer, with a slender path at the bottom, which followed every jut and cove of the black lake below.

“A nice place for a surprise!” thought the ex-soldier, as he set foot upon this narrow

track, and cast his eyes upon the almost precipitous cliff upon his right, the enchanted colouring of which had almost entirely disappeared, leaving a bluish-yellow *detritus* of shingle, with here and there a knob of rock projecting like a cannon from a porthole.

“The folks at the top would only have to loosen a few of yonder boulders, and Giuseppe himself would hesitate to force his way.”

Scarcely had Valentine given utterance to this reflection, when, as though the remark had provoked it, a huge round rock immediately above his proposed line of march began to move in its shallow bed: he could scarcely believe his eyes as he saw it tremble, and sway, and then rotating first slowly, then swifter and swifter, begin to leap with enormous bounds until it almost reached the bottom, when, with one gigantic spring, it rose into the air only to plunge with a sullen plash into the affrighted tarn. The noise, repeated as it was by a prolonged echo, was deafening: and the dust from the *débris*, which it shattered into a thousand pieces wherever it touched, rising smoke-like from the points of contact, produced all the

appearance of a cannon-shot: next to it succeeded a rapid settling of the shingle, exactly like the rattle of small-arms.

"I did not know there were such things as avalanches in this country," muttered the astonished Blake, coming to an involuntary pause. But before he could make up his mind either to advance or retreat, another and larger rock, as though emulating the morbid example of its fellow, sought refuge in the still depths of the tarn. The descent took place so much nearer to Valentine than the first that he watched, not without apprehension, its deer-like bounds, as it set this and that huge stone, almost as large as itself, in motion, and well-nigh brought down the hillside with it. As Valentine looked up in wonder, as soon as the subsidence of the dust would permit him, to the place whence this second portent had proceeded, he thought he caught sight of a human head. It was withdrawn from his view immediately, but the impression was so strong on his mind that he had seen it that he cried out: "Take care; there's a man below." Then, to his exceeding astonishment, a figure ap-

peared on the edge of the cliff gesticulating like some malignant spectre in German legend, and concluding his pantomimic performances with a scream of exultant mirth. Valentine Blake's lips were what is called Cupidon, and it was a bad sign with him, and a worse for his enemy, when they grew straight and shut close together, as they did now.

"Look out!" cried a hoarse voice, apparently half-suffocated with laughter, and then a vast rock, directly overhanging the spot where Valentine stood, began to move; not easily, however, for it was more deeply embedded than the other, and required a good deal of leverage to set it in motion: it was owing to this fortunate circumstance that he was able to place a considerable distance between himself and its line of descent before it began to move; but even as it was he incurred great risk, for the formidable missile happened to strike in its headlong course upon one of the projecting points of rock, whereupon it instantly became a shell, pulverising into a hundred fragments, which scattered themselves far and wide. When the individual, a handsome but coarse

young man of about twenty years of age, who was thus amusing himself next peered down, with twinkling mischievous eyes, to see what had become of the unhappy wayfarer, the path was vacant. For one instant his sunburned cheeks took a leaden hue, smitten with the thought that his practical joke had been carried considerably too far; but the next he leaped up into the air, and executed a flourish with the cudgel which he had been using as a lever.

"Why, this fool of a fellow," cried he, "is absolutely coming up the Screes!"

It certainly looked a foolhardy task enough which Blake had undertaken, but he had chosen the very track which the last boulder had taken, at the top of which there was no other rock to be set a-rolling so that he had, at all events, only the difficulties of the hill itself to face. These were indeed no slight ones, for as every step was placed on yielding ground, which not only gave way but carried him with it, the shingle loosened from above perpetually poured down upon him. When, in spite of these obstacles, however, it became evident that if his strength did not fail him the

stranger's determination would bring him to the top, the individual in possession of the heights began to bestir himself. He loosened the smaller rocks which lay in his neighbourhood, and aimed them with great particularity, although without effect, at the coming foe; and arming himself with formidable stones, he kept up an incessant fire, which the attacking force received or escaped according to circumstances, but in the face of which it never swerved or hesitated.

"Who the devil can it be?" murmured the young fellow a little uneasily, notwithstanding his almost Herculean proportions and the possession of his cudgel. "I don't know a man in the country that could come up Blackness Screes.—I say," roared he as the other drew ominously near, and he was able to scan that bearded face for the first time, with its eyes gleaming cold and vengeful, and its lips, that had never spoken save once, knit together with a purpose that boded him no good—"I say, if you'll be civil I will not throw any more stones."

It was a little late for a garrison to propose
VOL. II. E

conditions with the enemy so close to the gates; and so it occurred perhaps to the young man himself, for, upon receiving no reply to his proposition, he began to move away at a sharp run, although by no means at full speed, and looking behind him with every other step, like one who thinks it prudent to retreat, but at the same time has no apprehension of being overtaken. Nor was the youth's confidence in his legs misplaced, for he was one of the best runners in Cumberland. He watched the stranger arrive at the summit of the Screes, and sit down to rest; he saw him take out his handkerchief, and stanch in leisurely fashion the blood that flowed from a place in his forehead, where one of the small sharp stones had struck it: no idea of vengeance for the present seemed to be entertained. But the next time he turned round, which was after a longer interval, he beheld, to his surprise, the bearded man in hot pursuit, and not only running at great speed, but in a manner which, to his practised eye, suggested endurance.

“That long gallop which can tire the hound's deep hate and hunter's fire” is not the most

graceful form of motion in any animal, and can be recognised at some distance ; and the young rock-compeller was perfectly well aware that he had his work cut out for him ; at the same time he had the very great advantage of knowing his ground, whereas his pursuer was certainly a stranger to the district (or he would have never tried the Screes), and most probably a foreigner.

“You have good legs,” quoth the young fellow viciously, setting his large white teeth together, like a wild beast at bay, “but I will see how they like the peat-moss.”

This was a vast stretch of boggy land, not dangerous, indeed, but only traversable at speed along a certain zigzag track, in no way marked except from its being a shade less dark than the rest of the peaty ground. To set foot to the right or left of this was to sink many inches into the pitch-like ooze, which was to all appearance solid earth, and bore upon its treacherous surface the fairest and most delicate spring flowers of the Fell. Without slackening for an instant his now headlong speed, the young man traversed this narrow

and tortuous track, and not until he found himself upon the firm ground on the other side of the bog did he turn his head to see what had become of his pursuer. Then, with something akin to terror, he perceived that not only was the latter following every turn and winding of the path with bloodhound-like accuracy, but that, notwithstanding his own exertions, he was actually gaining ground upon him. The whole breadth of Blackbarrow, which was narrow in that part, had now been well-nigh crossed at this racing speed, and he was approaching the edge of it, beneath which lay, although by no means immediately, the vale and lake of Sandalthwaite. There were two ways by which to descend, right and left, both meeting five hundred feet or so lower down, in the same blind valley where Claude Murphy had wooed and won the fair Selina, the former of which was the longer but the less precipitous; and this, with the recollection of his pursuer's agility upon the Scree's fresh in his mind, the young man, without a moment's hesitation, chose. Tall and muscular, his own weight aided the rapidity of his descent, so

that in a space of time that could only be reckoned by seconds he reached what was comparatively level ground; yet lo! at the junction of the other path, there was the bearded man awaiting him, with sparkling eyes and heaving chest indeed, but far less out of breath, as it seemed to him, than out of temper. Wide-eyed and panting, the young Hercules found himself in an instant disarmed of his cudgel, taken by the throat, and shaken like a fractious child. "I shall wait till you have got your breath, sir," said his captor sternly, "and then I shall give you a thrashing;" and with that he folded his arms, and quietly regarded the youth, very much as his friend Claude might have looked at one of his own works of art, to which he was about to put a few finishing touches. But while he did so a curious change came over Valentine Blake's features; his brows, still knit, grew thoughtful rather than menacing; his eyes, which had contracted and acquired that steel-like hue which they wore only in moments of passion, opened to their fullest stretch, till astonishment at last entirely usurped the place of anger.

"What is your name—you young scoundrel?" asked he; but the latter part of the sentence seemed to arise rather from a sense of duty than from the embers of irritation. "Tell me who you are, and you may save your skin."

"What's that to you?" answered the young fellow gruffly.

"The voice as like as the face," murmured Valentine to himself; "and the disposition, as it would seem, inherited too—— What! you would, would you?"

"Ay, I would," replied the other grimly, who had suddenly taken advantage of his own recovered breath, and of his antagonist's pre-occupation, to throw himself upon Valentine from behind, pinioning his arms close to his side. "I'll give you a Cumberland 'felling' and when you're down I'll squeeze your throat a bit."

There was every probability of this threat being carried into effect, for, although the better-strung muscles of the elder man might have availed him in a protracted struggle, he knew that advantage to be useless to him in

his present plight ; and once down, from what he had experienced of the malignity of his foe, he did not doubt but that some serious injury would be inflicted on him. Had it been level ground, the powerful youth would easily have dragged him backwards, but the sloping turf enabled him to offer a stout resistance ; this compelled his antagonist to put forth all his strength, and no sooner did he feel him do so than Valentine instantly changed his tactics, and threw himself backwards with all his force. This stratagem succeeded even beyond his hopes ; his enemy's feet slipped from under him, and he came to the ground with a terrible thud, with Valentine upon him. The weight of the former, added to the violence of the shock, beat the breath out of the young rascal's lungs, so that the other scarcely needed the wrench with which he twisted himself out of his arms to regain his freedom. "Treacherous scoundrel !" cried he leaping to his feet. "Get up, get up, I say, or it will be the worse for you."

Slowly and sulkily the young giant gathered himself together, and did as he was bid.

"Look me in the face, and listen," said Valentine sternly.

It was not a pleasant face for a scoundrel to look at, knowing that it was that of his master, and the voice was one which might have compelled the attention of a ticket-of-leave man ; a face full of judgment without mercy, a voice like the tones of Doom. "Do you see this mark upon my forehead? a wound inflicted on an unoffending stranger, whom it was your duty to assist and guide. To amuse your idle time, you chose to put his life in peril, you yourself being, as you thought, in a place of safety. You are a cruel and cowardly man. I put to you a civil question—which I shall presently put to you again, for I mean to be answered—and your reply was a treacherous and unprovoked assault. Take this, therefore, to teach you better manners."

In an instant, like a bolt from the cloud, the clenched hand of Valentine Blake struck the young man with frightful force, as he stood sulkily submissive before him, and knocked him backwards. There he lay, on the green-sward, without sense or motion, till Valentine,

stepping down to the beck-side, dipped his handkerchief in the cool stream, and applied it to the temples of the fallen man. "Will you tell me your name, you scoundrel?" said he gravely, as the other slowly opened his eyes. "If not, get up, and then I will knock you down again. The poleaxe is the only instrument with brutes like you."

"What do you want my name for?" growled the other querulously, but obviously cowed.

"Reasons are thrown away upon brutes. I want it; that is enough. Once more, then, what is your name, and where do you live?"

"My name is Bentinck Woodford, and I live at Dewbank Hall," returned the other reluctantly.

"If you had told me that earlier you would have spared yourself two black eyes," observed the victor calmly. "My name is Valentine Blake, and your father has sent for me to be your tutor."

CHAPTER V.

VALENTINE AND ORSON.

THE ugly look upon Bentinck Woodford's face did not wear off when Valentine informed him who he was; but his sullen and vindictive tone was exchanged for a sheepish one, as he rose slowly from the ground, and said: "I suppose you'll tell the governor all this, and make a row about that little cut in your forehead?"

"Not unless you make a grievance about your two black eyes," answered the tutor quietly. "I am sorry, now that I know who you are, that I punished you so severely, though the provocation, you must allow, was extreme."

There was genuine regret in Valentine

Blake's words, and in his face something of true tenderness, as he held out his hand to the young fellow. There are some men who will never believe that pigs have no taste for pearls ; who use sharpness with vile natures only at the last extremity, and are prompt to make their peace-offering even for that just severity ; whom nothing cures of their misplaced faith and clemency to their lives' end.

Bentinck Woodford thrust both his hands into his pockets, and occupied himself with kicking a hole in the ground with his heel.

"Very well," said Valentine coolly, "if we are not to be friends, it is for the best, perhaps, that we have settled the question of 'Who shall be master?'—I suppose I cannot mistake my way to the Hall, if I go straight on?"

"You mustn't go straight on," replied the young man spitefully ; "you must go all round that wood yonder. The path through it is strictly private, and only to be used by the governor's permission."

"Have you a right to use it yourself?" asked Valentine, without showing the least sign of irritation.

"Of course I have; ain't I his son and heir!"

"Very well, Bentinck; in that case, you will go home that way, and I shall go with you."

"But I'm not going home," remonstrated the young man sullenly.

"You are, at all events, going to accompany me through that wood, and until we reach some public road. Do not let us fall out again, my young friend; come."

And so the two ill-assorted companions wound together through the copse's tender green to the little gate that opened upon the bridge that spanned the lake.

"You can't miss the road now," observed the young man sulkily; "but I shall stay here a little. If we went home together—and you with that cut in your forehead—the governor would be sure to say I did it. The way you got it, you know, was climbing up the Screes."

Valentine nodded carelessly, and slowly took the way thus pointed out to him, stopping to lean upon the bridge, and gazing, like a true campaigner, with eager scrutiny on the sur-

rounding hills. The freshness of the stream induced him to descend the rugged bank and lave his face and hands in the running water ; while engaged in this operation a shrill sharp voice exclaimed from the bridge above : “ What are you doing there, sir ? Are you aware that you are infringing upon the rights of private property ? ” The speaker was a little withered old man, with glittering eyes, that surveyed Valentine’s dusty garments with no great favour. “ This is not a high road to anywhere, sir,” added he sharply : “ the way to Keswick lies over yonder.”

“ I am not a tramp, sir,” returned Valentine smiling gravely : “ but I left the car in Blennerdale, to make my way over the hills : and coming up the Screes I met, as you see, with an unpleasant accident.”

“ And serve you right too ! ” answered the old gentleman gruffly. “ The idea of climbing up the Screes !—And where on earth do you expect to meet your—your hired vehicle ? ”

“ At Dewbank Hall, sir.”

“ Why, bless my soul, then you are Mr. Blake !—You have not such a dreadful accent

as most of your countrymen, or else I might have known you were the person I was expecting: nobody but an Irishman would begin his domestic duties with a broken head.—Sir, I am Mr. Ernest Woodford.”

At these words Valentine sprang up the bank, and received his employer's middle-finger tip in token of welcome.

“I have already seen your son, sir, who pointed out for me the road.”

“Umph!” replied Mr. Woodford suspiciously. “I am surprised he was so civil. You have no easy task before you, Mr. Blake. A greater lout I never knew than that lad of mine.”

“He is a very handsome young fellow,” observed Valentine.

“Handsome is as handsome does, sir. I tell you he's a lout, and I suppose I ought to know,” returned the old gentleman snappishly. “You will have to keep your eye on him, morning, noon, and night. Don't spare him, sir, because he is my son. Pay no respect to the fact that all that you see from where we are now standing will one day be his own: treat him as though the great Blennerdale

wadhole—of which you have doubtless heard—had never been discovered.—Did you see the last report in the *Commercial Times* about the Blennerdale wad, sir? I will show it you after dinner. The preference is absolutely given to it over Keswick lead.”

“Mr. Bentinck will meet with no indulgence at my hands because of his expectations, sir,” replied Valentine. “The heir, you know, so long as he is a child differeth in nothing from a servant.”

“Ay, that’s all very well; but it does not apply to the heir of such an estate as this; and besides, Ben is not a child.—Mr. Blake, sir”—here the old man’s voice changed to pleading tones—“I must have no secrets from you. Your references are so unimpeachable—and from persons of such good position—that I am sure I may confide in your honour; and besides,” added he naïvely, “you cannot but find it out for yourself before you’ve been a week in the house. My son is a man in everything in which it behoves him to be a child, and a baby only in those things in which he should have arrived at years of dis-

cretion. His extravagance is unbounded : his love for low company, his passion for physical violence, are something you can scarcely imagine. Who the devil he gets it from is a marvel to me. Mrs. Woodford, sir, is a most inoffensive person, and the first-cousin, once removed, of the present head of the Ballyga-boodies. Upon the other hand, he exhibits no trace of the commercial sagacity that has enabled me to double the fortune left to me by my late father. Sir, you will have to teach him compound long-division."

The two, who had been hitherto walking on the high road, now turned into the secluded carriage-drive that led towards the Hall.

"Look here!" continued the old man with angry vehemence, pointing to a beech-tree by the wayside: "he was picked up, only last night, under yonder tree. He could not reel home from the *Wrestler's Arms*. A few feet short of it, he would have fallen on the turn-pike-road, and perhaps been run over by the carrier's cart before morning. Think of a life so invaluable as his being placed in such peril through vicious imprudence! I doubt whether

any human being since this world was made has been so vexed and worried with an only son as I have been. Any other man would cut off such a scapegrace with a shilling, without the least hesitation ; but, sir, I can't do it, so much of the property being strictly entailed. If anything was to happen to Ben, sir, nearly half the Woodford estate goes to another branch of the family ; to persons most distasteful to me, and utterly unworthy of it. I make no apology for saying this ; it is necessary, Mr. Blake, that you should be aware of the tremendous nature of your responsibilities. Here is a boy, connected upon one side with the best blood in Great Britain—what is called blue blood, I believe, by those who are curious in such matters—and on the other, with a representative man, if I may say so, of that class which has raised England to its present elevation among nations : and yet, what is the lad himself ? a brawler, a sot, a—— But hush ! yonder is his mother. She feels all these things perhaps even more deeply than I do ; but her aristocratic training causes her to repress all external signs of irritation. A

Ballygabooley would no more confess to her mental tortures than would a North American Indian at the stake."

The subject of this daring metaphor was walking slowly before them towards the Hall, supported by the arm of a younger lady. When the two gentlemen overtook them Mrs. Woodfoord did not even turn her head, nor would she have stopped at all had it not been for her companion. "Here is Uncle Ernest, aunt——"

"And Mr. Valentine Blake, Bentinck's future tutor," added Mr. Woodford, speaking very loud.

"Ah! indeed," returned the old lady, bowing stiffly, and regarding the stranger with lack-lustre eyes. Her face would have been very sad but for its stolidity; it wore a look of chronic suffering, so natural to the features that it somehow ceased to be painful. It was as though mortification of the feelings had taken place, and the soul could be wrung no more. — "You will find the country very healthy, sir."

"He don't want health, ma'am, to look at

him," observed Mr. Woodford, in what Mr. Murphy would have called "his early manner," "and most countries have agreed with him, I fancy.—My niece, sir, Miss Evelyn Sefton—or Miss Evelyn, as everybody calls her."

Valentine Blake bowed low, so low that he scarcely met her gaze, and remained silent. Evelyn's face was quiet almost to sadness, but of a very different type of expression from that of her aunt. It was not the melancholy that supersedes pain, but the pensive seriousness that sets in at last upon the brightest natures, when their lot is cast among the Afflicted. With such persons, False Modesty has no place. Her calm, sweet voice addressed the stranger without a touch of ceremonious coldness. "My uncle tells me you have seen many lands, sir; I hope you will be compelled to confess that you have come home at last to behold the most beautiful of all. We are very zealous for Sandalghwaite and Lakeland."

In the recesses of his beard the stranger was heard to murmur that the district seemed indeed most lovely.

Evelyn noticed his embarrassment, and

pitied the poor fellow for his shyness. "You have lived in South America, I understand?"

"Many, many years, Miss Sefton; it is a glorious land; but, after all, there is no place like home."

"That's Ireland, you will observe, Evy," said Mr. Woodford with a harsh laugh.—"Upon my life, Mr. Blake, the presence of the ladies seems to bring out your accent, as the warmth brings out our adders in these parts."

Miss Sefton was either so taken up with her own reflections that she did not hear her uncle's rude remark, or, if she did, she chose to ignore it. "Have you ever been to Rio Janeiro, Mr. Blake?" asked she.

"My life has been passed in the more southern coasts, Miss Sefton—in Monte Video mostly, and the Rio Grande; but I have seen Rio Janeiro from the sea."

They had approached very near the Hall by this time, slowly as the party moved, in consideration for Mrs. Woodford, and the sun had lost its short-lived April power, yet, at Valen-

tine Blake's last words, Evelyn hastily pulled down her veil ; nor did she speak again, but as soon as they got within doors left her uncle to entertain his newly-arrived guest alone, until the dinner-hour.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. WOODFORD GIVES A BIT OF ADVICE.

"WHY is that boy not here?" inquired Mr. Ernest Woodford angrily, as the four sat down together. "This is the third time he has absented himself from table in the course of the present week. I won't have it, Clementina—I tell you I won't have it."

"I do not know why Bentinck is not here," replied Mrs. Woodford in slow, preoccupied tones.

"You never do, madam," answered the master of the house. "I might as well apply for domestic information to your poll-parrot. I daresay the people at the *Wrestler's Arms* could tell me where your son is, although it is quite possible that by this time he may not be

in a condition to be aware of it himself.—My dear Evy, it's not a bit of good looking so sagaciously at me, for I have kept nothing from Mr. Blake, and he fully understands the sort of young gentleman with whom he has to deal.—Oh, here you are, are you, sir? A pretty time to present yourself at table! However, I am happy to say the soup is cold.—Bring the fish, John. We do not wait for Mr. Bentinck.”

The young gentleman, thus welcomed, took the vacant place that awaited him upon his mother's left without uttering a word.

“Who gave you those two black eyes, sir?” inquired his father presently. “You have been in another brawl, I suppose, since yesterday.”

“A branch of a sapling flew up and struck me over the nose, father, as I was making my way through the copse.”

“A lie with a circumstance,” answered Mr. Woodford contemptuously.—“Have you been over to the works, as I told you to do?”

“Yes, sir. Miles Ripson thinks that they are just coming upon another vein.”

"Miles Ripson is a fool," returned Mr Woodford decisively.—"What does George Adams think about it?"

"He thinks the same."

"Very good. If he should turn out to be right I shall shut up the wadhole for six months; there shall be no glut of Blennerdale lead in the market.—That's the great advantage of having a good balance at one's banker's, Mr. Blake—a thing I daresay you are not much accustomed to—we can hold on as long as we like; then, sooner or later, we come to dictate our own terms. You learned gentlemen talk of Knowledge being Power, because you are bound to cry up the article you happen to have in stock: but, after all, there is nothing like wealth."

"That is true, Mr. Woodford," replied the tutor gravely: "there is nothing like it. Nothing so useful, and yet so dangerous; so powerful, and yet so likely to be misdirected. I am sure you did not mean your son to understand that because he is to be rich there is no occasion for him to acquire Knowledge."

"No, of course not," stammered Mr. Wood-

ford. "He can't be such an idiot as to imagine that, when I've just gone to the expense——"

"Uncle Ernest, your wineglass is in a very dangerous position," observed Evelyn earnestly.

Valentine shot a momentary glance of gratitude towards her for the timely interruption, and saw that her face was crimsoned with the apprehension of what her uncle might have been about to say. It was evident that Mr. Woodford perceived and accepted the rebuke which her tone conveyed, for he did not continue his reference to Mr. Blake's stipend.

"At the same time," observed he cynically, "it must not be forgotten that those who depreciate Wealth are, without exception, the people who don't possess it—persons whom Providence has placed out of the influence of that particular temptation—eh?"

"It is not to be expected, to use your own argument," returned the tutor smiling, "that folks should underrate the article they themselves have in stock: but I have known persons—or at least *a* person—who might have been very rich, without the sacrifice of a

scruple of conscience, and yet refused to be so."

"Pooh, pooh ; I don't believe it," answered Mr. Woodford bluntly.

"I cannot prevent your incredulity, sir ; but the fact remains the same," observed the tutor very gravely. "The man I speak of has, to my own personal knowledge, refused a free gift from a whole nation of a sum which even an English millionaire would deem considerable."

"May I ask, sir, supposing the money was not in paper, and that he could have got clear off with it," inquired Mr. Woodford sneeringly, "whether this magnanimous friend of yours was also an Irishman ?"

"No, sir," replied Valentine, with imperturbable good-temper : "he was an Italian."

"Is this generous and noble person still alive?" asked Evelyn with interest.

"Yes, Miss Sefton. Giuseppe, I thank Heaven, for the world's sake, is still alive."

"And not in jail? Come now, confess," observed Mr. Woodford cunningly. "I have always observed that people who live for the

human race, and not for themselves, do somehow invariably contrive to get into jail."

"Giuseppe has been in prison more than once," answered Valentine calmly.

"Did I not say so!" exclaimed Mr. Woodford, bringing his fist down on the table with a scornful laugh. "Why, I know the fellow as though I had seen him with my own eyes.—Now, you take my advice, Mr. Blake—the advice of a man whose opinion is worth having—and don't you have anything more to do with this Quixotic individual, for, sooner or later, he'll come to the gallows."

"He has been at the gallows' foot before now, sir," answered the tutor, without moving a muscle.

"Well, that's candid, at all events!" returned his astonished host. "There's a proverb in England, Mr. Blake, which perhaps you may have forgotten, that a man is known by the companions he has kept; and really this Giuseppe——"

"I am to blame, sir," interrupted the tutor frankly. "To be known as the friend of him I speak of is the highest title to which an

honest man need aspire; but I should have told you what sort of prison he was confined in, and with what sort of gallows he was threatened. So far from committing a crime, Giuseppe is incapable of conceiving one; nay, he can hardly credit such a conception in another. It was his tender confidence which betrayed him into the hands of his political enemies, and it was they who threw him into duress, and would only have brought him out to die if they had had their will."

"Ah, I see; he was one of your thorough-paced revolutionists.—Now, my dear sir, if there is one thing I pride myself upon in this world, it is on being an Englishman; and I'll tell you, if you like, what we English think of the class of people to which this acquaintance of yours belongs."

"I am sure, sir," replied Valentine, looking steadfastly into the face of his host, and speaking with great distinctness, "that in whatever you said upon that subject you would be particular to remember that you were speaking of an absent man in the presence of his attached and loving friend:

but since it is a matter about which we are not likely to agree, perhaps it would be better not to broach it. As the ladies, however, seem interested in my hero, I daresay you will permit me to show them his portrait : he gave it to me, when I parted from him last year, with his own hands."

It was certainly curious to hear this great-bearded man talking of his friend with the tender reverence of a lover for his mistress, and to see him handle the locket, which he took from around his neck, with the respect which a papist might show for the image of his patron saint ; but Mr. Ernest Woodford was utterly confounded by such proceedings, and sat with his mouth open, and a morsel of food getting cold upon his fork, like some mechanical contrivance whose concerted movement has suddenly stopped working.

"It is a fine face, is it not, Miss Sefton ?" said the tutor, placing the locket in his neighbour's hand.

"It is indeed," returned she. "What a victory do the mild eyes obtain over the rugged features !"

"That is just so," assented Valentine with eagerness. "There is a certain benign authority in their strength which seems to me to approach nigh to divinity itself."

Clementina languidly surveyed the portrait, and pronounced it to be wanting in style. Mr. Bentinck grunted "Humph!" and pushed it rudely back to Valentine. Mr. Woodford, whose wheels were again revolving, pursued his meal with resolute indifference, as though no object of greater interest than Mansfield pudding were on the table.

Valentine began to perceive, too late, that his enthusiasm had been at least ill-timed. Why had he not remembered Mr. Murphy's advice, and kept his opinions to himself, instead of bringing them under the notice of these vapid people, and consequently into ridicule? It was true that Miss Sefton had understood, and possibly sympathised with what he had said; but he felt that that circumstance placed him rather in a worse position with respect to the others. Mr. Woodford, at least, was scowling from under his shaggy brows, and Bentinck wore a malicious

grin. The rest of the dinner was passed in almost total silence. When the ladies rose to leave the table he felt that the presence of a third person, even if it were his loutish pupil, would have been a great relief, but the young gentleman slipped out, unrebuked, almost immediately afterwards, and left him to a tête-à-tête with Mr. Woodford.

"No wine?" ejaculated that gentleman irritably. "Why, you are as bad as Warton. No sooner have the women turned their backs than he cries out for his whisky."

"I take no spirits either, sir, thank you," returned Valentine smiling.

"Oh, you keep your wits clear, do you, Mr. Blake? Well, I confess I like a man who takes his liquor; who meets one, as one may say, upon equal terms."

"Nay, rather than be supposed to take any advantage, I will drink some claret," replied the tutor good-naturedly.—"You were promising to show me some specimens of your Blennerdale lead, sir, after dinner."

"Was I?" returned the host suspiciously.

"Well, here are two lumps upon the mantel-piece, each worth their weight in silver. You have no such rich mines in South America, I fancy?"

"But there are diamond mines, you know, sir; although I cannot say I ever chanced to see one."

"Ay, I am astonished at that," observed the other sneeringly: "you travellers generally do see everything, although you so very rarely bring home a specimen of the wonder. I daresay you have a shrewd notion, now, in your own mind, Mr. Blake, that my wadhole here in Blennerdale is better worth having than most of the Golcondas in the part of the world from whence you come?"

"Well, really, sir, I am no judge," replied Valentine coolly. "But from what you tell me about the value of the lead—and supposing that there is plenty of it in your mine—it must, of course, be a source of great wealth."

"Yes," said Mr. Woodford, with half-shut eyes, and his head upon one side, like Reynard the fox; "and I daresay you think that every-

body connected with me must consequently be well off—eh?”

“I have never thought about it, Mr. Woodford. You told me yourself, however, that your son would inherit a great property.”

“Yes, Mr. Blake, so I did; but it might have also struck you that where there was so much money going, there would be plenty to spare for everybody; that my niece, Evelyn Sefton, for instance, would be likely to have a pretty penny some day.”

“Such an idea never entered into my thoughts, sir,” observed the tutor quietly; “but since you mention it, I should suppose Miss Sefton was a young lady of some expectations.”

“Well, now, Mr. Blake, since you are going to be an inmate of this house, it is as well that you should understand this matter clearly. My niece has only a few hundred pounds of her own; not sufficient to tempt any young fellow to saddle himself with a wife, I do assure you. You’ll excuse my speaking so bluntly, but—you can’t help yourself, I know—but you’re an Irishman.”

Here Valentine Blake, rather to his host's embarrassment, burst into a roar of laughter.

"Oh, of course you've got good spirits," continued Mr. Woodford disdainfully. "Your countrymen are never without them. Many of them—mind, I only say many of them; there may be exceptions, of course—many of them prosecute their stratagems under cover of this very good-fellowship: they are so candid, confound them! that nobody gives them credit for cunning. I speak feelingly, because there was just such a fellow once in this very house, sitting as it might be in your very place, and laughing in my face just as you did a minute ago, and yet, sir, that man was nothing less than a crafty fortune-hunter. He stole my sister away from under my roof. It is true that she didn't require much stealing—a very gentle pressure suffices when a young lady is eight-and-thirty—but he was a rascal all the same. Now, that gentleman made a great mistake in what he did, and has derived much less pecuniary advantage, thanks to Bentinck's arrival, than he expected; but Mr. Claude Murphy's bargain would be a good one

in comparison with that which the man would make who married my niece Evelyn without my consent. She has scarcely any fortune of her own, sir, but is entirely dependent upon my Will—when I choose to make one—for whatever she will possess in future.—Do I make myself intelligible to you, Mr. Blake?”

“You are very frank, sir,” observed the tutor quietly. “Nobody can accuse you of false delicacy, I am sure.”

“I hope not, sir. Why should a man in my position be delicate, I should like to know? and, besides, ain’t I speaking to you for your own good?”

“Very true, Mr. Woodford,” rejoined the tutor thoughtfully. “But however well meant your warning may be, it is, I assure you, wholly unnecessary; for, not to make your niece any longer the subject of our conversation—which, I feel, so far as I am concerned, would be to commit an impertinence—I beg to assure you that my humble affections are already engaged.”

It was strange that only a few days before Valentine Blake had had occasion to make the

same avowal to Mrs. Murphy; and perhaps stranger still that the tone in which he made it should have convinced, as it did in each case, notwithstanding their natural scepticism, the persons to whom it was addressed.

“I am deuced glad to hear you say so, Mr. Blake,” returned his host with genuine pleasure.—“Come, pass the claret. Here’s to your friend Giuseppe, and—although I don’t think it probable—may he die with his shoes off!”

CHAPTER VI.

EVELYN'S TROUBLES.

WHEN the ladies left the Black Squire and his guest to that *tête-à-tête* which we have recorded in the last chapter, Mrs. Woodford retired as usual to her boudoir. Evelyn accompanied her, lest her aunt should feel inclined for a game of backgammon ; but Clementina was too exhausted with the unwonted effort of entertaining a stranger at dinner for so energetic a pastime. She lay down on the sofa, and took up the eternal embroidery-frame, which was study and leisure, pleasure and business, to her all in one ; nay, it was more to her than such occupations are to those, even of her own sex, who are most devoted to them, for it occupied the place of conversation.

Her niece was quite astonished when, after a stitch or two, her aunt opened her thin lips for the passage of an observation. "Evelyn," said she in a voice less listless than usual, "you like this man who has come to be your cousin's tutor?"

"Yes, aunt, I do."

"I am glad to hear you say that, dear; not because you are telling the truth—for I would rather he had not taken your fancy—but because you tell it so frankly. If you had given me an evasive answer I should have feared that something more than your fancy was touched. I am a selfish old woman, you know, and I should be sorry to see you fall in love with anybody."

"There is no fear, aunt."

"Yes, there is," returned Clementina quietly: "there is always fear for an old woman like me—alone, unhappy friendless,—that is, I mean, but for you, my dear—when I think of the possibility of your leaving me. I should not have minded your marrying Charles Woodford, for I think he would have been good to me; but since your aunt Selina

got him put out of the way—— O yes, she did: you have suffered at that woman's hands almost as much as I have done—I trust you will not marry at all, until I am dead. You are still very beautiful, although you are not very young, and I shall not keep you long.”

“Pray, don't talk so, dear aunt; you are weak and tired; try and get a little sleep. Uncle will, I daresay, be longer in the smoking-room than usual to-night; but if I do not come back in time to make tea, please tell Mary to say that I have stepped over to the parsonage—that is, if you should not feel well enough to go down to the drawing-room yourself.”

“Very well, Evelyn. But stop a moment—I don't see the key in the *escritoire*.”

“Mary has it, aunt,” returned the girl with a deep-drawn sigh. “I hoped you would have no need of it.”

“More than ever, child—more than ever,” replied Clementina peevishly. “Send Mary up to me; and don't be longer than you can help. Evelyn, you don't know what it is—

you who have your books and your pleasant thoughts—to be left alone.”

Ere Evelyn left the house, she sought, therefore, what was called the “housekeeper’s room,” where Mary Ripson was always to be found, whose special mission it had become of late years to wait upon Mrs. Woodford. Mary had had no open quarrel with her husband, but she had not lived under the same roof with him since he had left “the Nook,” which he had been obliged to do very soon after his unpleasant interview with Dr. Warton at the Wishing-gate. The farm was let, and Miles, as we have said, was once more employed at the wad-mine, in no very superior condition to that which he had formerly occupied ; while George Adams was head-manager of the works. It was the old, old tale of the Idle and Industrious Apprentices, which never lacks modern illustration. Her semi-widowhood had by no means preyed upon Mary’s mind ; and although she was no longer young, being, indeed, not far from forty, her form was buxom, and her face more cheerful, if not quite so comely as when she was a bride. As

foster-mother to the baby-heir, she had had the run of the library, as well as of the larder, at Dewbank Hall, and as the confidential attendant of Mrs. Woodford, she had parted with neither of these perquisites. Even now, as Evelyn enters the snug little apartment on the ground-floor, she finds Mary Ripson sitting before the cozy fire, culling enjoyment, now from the realms of fancy, for she holds a volume of romances in her hand, and now from a less ethereal source, in the shape of liberally-buttered toast, which lies upon the tea-tray by her side.

“Lor, Miss Evelyn, how you did make me jump!” cried she. “I was just getting to the place where the Lady Geraldine thinks she sees the eyes of her great-grandfather’s picture a-blinking at her from the wall, and has a suspicion that somebody is behind it.”

“I am going out to the parsonage, Mary, and you had better keep your mistress company while I am gone: she is in very bad spirits to-night, indeed.”

“And no wonder, miss, with the shameful way in which she sees poor Master Bentinck

treated. Think of their sending to London for a man with a great beard to keep him in order, as though he were a mere child, instead of as handsome and well-grown a young fellow as any gentleman in the country!"

"Ah, you always spoiled Cousin Bentinck, Mary," returned Evelyn, holding up her finger reprovingly. "I don't know whether his faults are not owing to you as much as to anybody. I am as sorry for him as you can be; but I think it was high time that he should have somebody to look after him."

"Oh, *he'll* do well enough, don't fear, miss. He's a little frolicsome, that's all. Now, if he only had a nice wife——"

"A wife, Mary? Why, Bentinck is not eighteen."

"Well, Miss Evy, I was only eighteen when I was married."

A sufficient reply might have been easily made to this by a reference to the result of the union in question, but Evelyn's nature was far too gentle to make use of such an argument. "Then you were a woman, Mary, and that makes all the difference," said she. "I

do hope you have never spoken to Bentinck himself in this way?"

"No, miss, not I. But what I say is, where there is Love between two young folks—and plenty besides love to keep them upon afterwards—and especially if the laddie is inclined to be unsteady—it is better that they should be man and wife."

"Better for one, possibly, although I doubt *that*, but certainly not for the other," returned Evelyn decisively. "I should be exceedingly sorry for any respectable girl who should marry my cousin before he comes to years of discretion.—It is nothing, however, concerning Bentinck that makes my aunt so low-spirited this evening, and be sure you go up to her as soon as you have had your tea."

Evelyn's face grew very grave as she left the house and took her way along the dusky avenue, as though the mission upon which she was bent had acquired a more serious aspect within the last few minutes.

"If Mary is really encouraging him," said she to herself, "it is the more necessary that I should be firm. What would my uncle say, if

he did but guess at Bentinck's imprudence, and what effect might it not have upon my unhappy aunt?"

Immersed in thought, she moved mechanically over the well-known ground, always in shade, and sometimes in absolute darkness, until she was presently brought to halt in a narrow lane by the noise of hurrying steps: she was not sure for the moment whether it was man or horse that was coming, and drew under the hedgerow for safety. A man passed by her at full speed, yet not so fast but that she felt sure she recognised her cousin Bentinck.

"He is hastening home, in order that I may not observe his absence," sighed she. "I wish he would at least be honest and open with me." A few steps further the fresh evening air became laden with the scent of flowers, whereby she knew better than her sight could tell her, in that full-foliaged place, that she was approaching Mr. Wilson's garden. The little white gate which showed itself in the quickset was still in motion, and she easily guessed whose hasty exit had set it swinging.

How peaceful the pastor's cottage looked, guarded by its two fair sycamores, and looking down across its open lawn upon the sleeping lake!

Through the unshuttered windows of the little parlour she could see Mr. Wilson bending his white head over the writing-table, and his still fair wife priskly blying her needle. The young May moon would shine that night upon no simpler and more loving pair than they. Their circumstances, through her uncle's influence, were greatly better than they had formerly been, although still very humble; the books, with which the room was plentifully furnished, had been Evelyn's own gift, as well as the silver reading-lamp, by the light of which the good man was now composing his discourse for the next Sabbath. But the spectatress looked in vain for that which was wont to be the chief ornament of that pleasant room, their daughter Lucy Wilson, the Flower of Sandalthwaite.

Across the lattice of an upper bedroom window, however, Evelyn saw a shadow which she knew; the substance of it came towards

the toilet-table, looked into the mirror, and there delayed, doubtless "well pleased to find itself so fair;" then placed with care, in a little glass, some object, which the watcher took to be a flower, bent down to kiss it, and then the room was dark. The next moment Evelyn had turned the handle of the house-door, and met Lucy in the little hall, just as she was about to enter the parlour.

"I want to speak to you, Lucy," said she in a low grave voice; "and not before your father and mother."

"Just as you please, Evelyn," returned the other petulantly. "How you frightened me, coming upon one all of a sudden and in the dark!"

"No; just as *you* please, Lucy," replied Evelyn with quiet firmness. "It is to spare you that I ask to speak with you in private; for my own part, I am ready, and would much prefer to say what I have to say in yonder room."

The tone in which she spoke was almost motherly in its patient tenderness; and yet the pair might well have been taken for

sisters, with no great span of time between them; for Evelyn was very young-looking for her time of life, and Lucy was so womanly for her tender years, that the one might have been two-and-twenty, and the other just of age. The sedate and thoughtful expression of the elder contrasted, however, strongly enough with the other's eager but indecisive face, with its delicate colour ebbing and flowing with every change of thought, and its tender, assenting, almond-shaped eyes.

"Let us go into the garden then," returned Lucy; "not that I have anything to be ashamed of, Evelyn, whatever it is that you may have to say."

"God forbid, dear Lucy. I never supposed that you wished to break your father's heart. There he is, look you, and your mother too! Let us sit upon this bench, whence we can see them. What do you think he would say—what would he feel, if he knew that his only daughter gave clandestine interviews to a young man, whom she knows can never marry her?"

"Eavesdropper!" cried Lucy, starting pas-

sionately from her seat ; “ it is *you* who ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

“ Hush, hush ; you know me better, dear girl, than to think that. I came here, it is true, this evening to have some serious talk with you about my cousin ; but I never dreamed that matters had gone so far between you. I met him just now running down the hill, like a thief in the night. Yes, I say a thief, and he came to steal what is far more precious to you than gold—your good name, Lucy Wilson.”

“ How dare you talk to me like that, Miss Sefton ?” sobbed Lucy angrily, “ and to speak so ill of your own cousin, too !”

“ I dare talk thus because I love you, Lucy, and I dare speak thus of Bentinck Woodford because I know him,” answered Evelyn firmly. “ When I look upon your fair face I cannot blame him for having fallen in love with it, but it is very base of him to have told you so. If he were an impulsive lad, who would give up home and friends, and all present comfort, for your sake, I could forgive him ; but that is not his character. If he had the boldness

to say to his father : ' My heart is fixed upon Lucy Wilson, and I mean to marry her,' there would be something to admire even in his undutifulness ; but he has no such courage. He will never marry you without his father's consent, Lucy ; and while Ernest Woodford lives that consent will never be given."

" We are young, and we can wait," cried Lucy, dropping her eyelids.

" Did Bentinck propose waiting?" returned Evelyn gravely. " O Lucy, Lucy, there can be no great distance of time ere that gray head in yonder room is laid in the churchyard, but beware how you shorten it by your own act! It is not my place, I know—it is your mother's place—to speak to you thus, dear girl: but she does not guess what I know. Like your good father—nay, like your innocent self—she does not dream of harm."

" And there *is* no harm!" exclaimed Lucy passionately. " I will not submit to such injurious things. I will not listen to another word, Miss Sefton."

" Perhaps it is better so," said Evelyn

thoughtfully. "I will go in at once, and speak to your parents."

"They will not believe you," returned the young girl vehemently.

"They will not believe me, Lucy!" echoed Evelyn with astonishment. "What, then, are you conscious of having committed a folly—to call it by the mildest name—so great that your father and mother would never credit it! Then, if they will not listen to me, I know who will; I will go straight to my uncle, as I ought to have done long ago, perhaps——"

"O Evelyn, Evelyn, for Heaven's sake, do not do that!" cried Lucy, clasping her hands. "You do not know how angry Bentinck will be; he will think I told you that he was here to-night."

"Are you then afraid of him, Lucy?" answered Evelyn gravely. "If so, you should thank Heaven, girl, that you can never be his wife. His anger cannot hurt you *now*."

"But you will hurt *him*. Remember how hardly his father thinks of him already. O spare him, spare him, Evelyn, for my sake!"

"It is for your sake that I dare not spare him, Lucy, although God knows I would do so if I could. I have stood between him and my uncle's wrath a hundred times: you know I have."

"But if he promises never to come hither again without your leave!"

"He did promise that, Lucy, not a week ago, and he has broken his word to me, as he will one day break it with you. There is no truth, alas, in Bentinck Woodford—none."

"But if *I* promise, Evelyn? If I solemnly declare that he shall have no private interview with me, henceforth; that unless his father consents—well, unless some change in his circumstances shall arise which should make our union possible, we shall be but as brother and sister, mere acquaintances, if you will have it so—but do not, do not tell Mr. Woodford, for mercy's sake." Rising from the bench beneath the sycamore, on which they both were sitting, Lucy threw herself on her knees before her friend with streaming eyes.

Evelyn gently raised her, and folded her in

her arms like a penitent child. "Yet this once more I will not tell my uncle," answered she. "I feel that I am weak to thus give way, but I put trust in your plighted word, Lucy. I hope, I pray you may not deceive me. If you do——"

"I won't, I won't!" interrupted Lucy passionately; "my dear, kind Evelyn, I never, never will!"

"If you do," continued the other with solemnity, "you will repent it as never woman did.—See! your father has done his writing, and will be presently asking for his darling. For seventy years that man has walked with God, Lucy; beware, lest any conduct of yours make him imagine that God has abandoned him in his old age. I am older than you, Lucy; I have not lived among simple, guileless folk, as you have. I have heard things—and know them to be true—of Bentinck Woodford that I must not tell you, but which make me shudder when I think of his coming here to-night. I blush to have to say such things of my own flesh and blood; but these lips are honest ones, dear girl; the last which pressed

your cheek were false and selfish. God bless and guard you, Lucy !”

Not trusting herself to stay another moment, lest she should say too much, yet fearing that she had left something unsaid where argument was so necessary to be urged, Evelyn tore herself away from the half-fainting girl, and hastened home. How fortunate it was that she had chosen that evening to give the warning she had long felt to be necessary, but which, with natural reluctance, she had delayed to offer. By hints alone, which Lucy had persisted in ignoring, had she hitherto endeavoured to awaken the simple girl to the danger of encouraging the attentions of her reckless cousin ; but to Bentinck himself she had spoken plainly, weeks ago. He had answered, bluntly enough, that he was not such a fool—not so blind, that is, to the disadvantages of such a union—as to think of making Lucy Wilson his wife ; that a little flirtation was all that he proposed to himself ; and where was the harm of that, he would like to know ? In vain Evelyn pointed out to him the wrong he was doing in thus trifling

with the affections of one even more childlike in experience of the world than she was in years. He had replied with levity, nay, almost with brutality, to her appeal. As she listened to him, the recollection of the village gossip, which had invaded her ears of late, respecting the young man's conduct, involuntarily recurred to her mind, and seemed to freeze her blood. Was it possible that this mere lad could be the selfish reprobate which report had painted him? Sooner or later, the Vicious, she had read, will always become Heartless; but it had seemed incredible that one so young as her cousin should already be in that condition. With just indignation, she threatened that, if he continued to pay his addresses to the curate's daughter, she would disclose the matter to her uncle; and then he changed his tone. He protested that nothing had passed between him and Lucy of a serious sort, and that for the future he would avoid Gable End altogether. He passed his word as a gentleman, and Evelyn had believed him, in spite of several former occasions on which he had proved unworthy of credit; and now he had

had a clandestine interview with Lucy that very evening, which was probably not the first by many.

Evelyn's heart was heavy with thought ere she reached the Hall. The gentlemen, she was told, had had coffee in the smoking-room, and would not take tea. She repaired, therefore, not to the drawing-room, but to her aunt's boudoir, where Mary Ripson was sitting with the same enthralling volume in her hand, for she was not a rapid reader. Mrs. Woodford was on the sofa, as she had left her, but the embroidery-frame lay on the table beside her, and she was fast asleep. Evelyn stole quietly to her side, and stooped down as though to kiss her cheek ; then turned a glance, half-sorrowful, half-expostulatory, upon the student of romance. "Yes, miss, she *would* do it," whispered Mary in answer to her look. "I know it's bad for her, but what could I do ? and besides, it really seems to be her only comfort, poor lady."

"What a dreadful house this is !" murmured Evelyn to herself ; but Mary's sharp ears caught her words. "Dreadful, miss ? Lor

bless me, why should that be? Missus is not very strong, that's all, and wants something to soothe her."

Evelyn made no reply, but going into her own apartment threw up the window to its full height, and sat there with anguished face, drinking in the cool night-air: the atmosphere of the room from which she had just come was heavy with the fumes of Opium.

CHAPTER VIII,

TUTOR AND PUPIL.

THE amount of education—in the sense of learning—that can be imparted to an ignorant young gentleman of eighteen, who considers himself old enough to be his own master, and who hates a book as a dog hates a stick, is very small. In the case of Bentinck Woodford, the foundations of whose scanty knowledge had been laid in a neighbouring grammar-school, where the son of the Squire of Sandalthwaite was treated with the respect he did *not* merit, it was infinitesimal. After two or three attempts, of a most resolute character, to relieve the fortress of his pupil's mind—besieged by all the powers of Idleness—Valentine Blake desisted from such forlorn-hopes

altogether. If the garrison rejected his supplies, it was clearly no use to strive to provision it; and although he still daily threw in a few handfuls of mental food, it was rather to save his own conscience than with any hope of a beneficial result. He resolved to try to do his duty to his charge by other means, namely, by working upon his better nature. However bad may be our dispositions, they are at least made up of materials, some of which are less objectionable than others; and it was these negative advantages which Valentine endeavoured to turn to good account.

In place of study he substituted conversation, for although Bentinck was stubborn and antagonistic to an incredible degree, he judged that the lad would submit to be talked to, and even to vouchsafe replies when desired to do so, in consideration of his exemption from what he disliked still more. When the tutor confessed to Mr. Woodford the failure of his first efforts with his son, and explained to him the new system which he was about to put in action, his employer at once answered that the

scheme was futile. "You don't know that fellow, Ben, sir: he is as obstinate as a string of overloaded mules. He will never open his mouth, nor even his ears, for that matter—that is, if he entertains the least suspicion that you are trying to improve his mind. But, if you can get him to imagine that he is wasting his time, or, still better, getting an advantage over you by wasting it, without your being aware of the fact, then he will listen to whatever you may have to say. Now, there's my niece, Evelyn—the only woman with a grain of sense, who is not a Tartar, that I ever met in with—she is the person to help us here. If my son is influenced by anything besides beer and tobacco—— Now, don't pretend to be shocked, Mr. Blake, or I shall begin to have my suspicions that you are not so honest as I take you for. You must know what Bentinck is by this time, yourself; and do you expect that *I*, who have seen these many years into what sort of hands the great Woodford estate will one day pass, should be mealy-mouthed in speaking of the matter?"

"But still, Mr. Woodford, he is your son," said Valentine, not without a touch of pity.

"You need not remind me of that, sir," answered the Black Squire passionately, and beginning that wild-beast walk of his up and down the room. "I swear to you that there are times when I almost wish that I had never been burdened with such an offspring. What have *I* done to deserve that all I and my father before me have built up with such sagacity and prudence should revert to one who will dissipate our garnered wealth in a few years of riot? He will do it, sir, I know he will do it—curse him!" screamed the old man, clenching his thin fingers, as though he were indeed calling down some malediction upon his degenerate boy.

"You were speaking of Miss Sefton," interrupted Valentine, anxious to put a stop to so sad a scene.

"I was *thinking* of her, at all events," continued Mr. Woodford with angry vehemence. "Look you, I had rather make that girl, my niece—the child of one I had little or no regard for—the heir of all I have to leave, than

my own son. And I would do it, too—I would, by Heaven—if there were no Selina Murphy in the world to jeer and flout at me. I see her watching me with greedy eyes for something for her brat. But not so much as a bone shall the dog have, sir, from my table. It is that knowledge alone which gives me comfort. For seventeen years and more I have heard no word of her: when I wrote to her of Bentinck's birth, she made no reply; but she is not one—not she—to sit down content with what Fate has given her. When I think of her, sir, my son grows dear to me; for while he lives Claude Woodford Murphy—Woodford, forsooth, she named him, counting her chicken safe ere mine was hatched—will be the beggar that his father was before him.”

So violent was the old man's hate and passion that he never looked towards his companion, but poured forth his denunciation against its unconscious objects as though he were alone.

Valentine had to touch his arm as though by accident, as he walked swiftly to and fro, to bring the Black Squire to the conscious-

ness that he was in the presence of his son's tutor.

"You were saying, sir, that you thought Miss Evelyn could assist us in the plan which we had resolved to adopt with Bentinck."

"Yes, yes," returned Mr. Woodford with impatient irritation: "if anything can be done with him, Evelyn can do it. You may tell her, from me, that I wish her to give you every help."

Whereat the tutor, with a grave bow, departed, and left the unhappy old man to resume the thread of his bitter thoughts alone.

Thus, a companionship which would have been wearisome enough to Valentine became very pleasurable, since Evelyn Sefton shared it. She was accustomed, after her domestic duties were over, to enter the pupil-room upon some pretence of a missing book, or a mislaid letter of her uncle's, and then the unfruitful studies of the morning would be suspended, and the improvement of the unsuspecting Bentinck's mind would be proceeded with in a new direction. To draw the obtuse lad out was about as easy as to draw a badger; he

would sit at meals for a week and never open his mouth, except for the purpose of filling it and of mastication. Without a grain of imagination, the young fellow seemed always self-involved and preoccupied (as very dull folks often do), save for an occasional malevolent glance directed towards his male parent, whom he feared and hated in about equal proportions. But in the pupil-room the lad was a little more at ease, and whether from the reason which his father had so disparagingly suggested, or not, he not only appeared to listen with some interest to what was said, but even took some part (though chiefly by ejaculations and expressions of incredulity, it is true) in the conversations. What was found to please him best was Valentine's adventures in South America, with their incidents of war and peril; and in spite of his contempt upon the first occasion when Giuseppe's name was mentioned, he was forced to confess that, if what was told of him was true, this friend of Mr. Blake's must be a fine fellow. "A deuced sight better," he was so good as to remark upon one occasion, "than any other of his

countrymen, such as Julius Cæsar, or Alexander the Great (it was no use correcting him in little local discrepancies), about whom there used to be such a fuss made at Hawkstone Grammar-school."

"I agree with you there, Bentinck," remarked his tutor approvingly, "for Cæsar and Alexander only served their own ends, whereas Giuseppe had always in view the interests of others."

If Mr. Murphy had been present, he would doubtless have observed to himself that the last remark was a speech for the Gallery; and certainly it made more impression upon Evelyn than on the person to whom it was addressed. But, nevertheless, Valentine obtained this much with his pupil, that he was able to reprove him indirectly for the vicious principles or weak opinions to which he occasionally gave utterance, by an anecdote of how this fine fellow Giuseppe had acted under circumstances which were apposite to the case in point. "If you are a better or a braver fellow than he, Bentinck, then you are right, and he is wrong, but not otherwise;" and this


sometimes evoked a retractation of opinion, which no amount of argument would have compelled. Thus, upon one occasion, when the disrespectful youth happened casually to refer to Mrs. Woodford as "the old woman," Valentine took up his parable as follows.

"You are doing very wrong, Bentinck, to speak of your mother in such terms; for myself, I was so unhappy as to lose that parent in my infancy, and I consider it the greatest misfortune of my life. Giuseppe used to say that no man who did not love his own mother, and treat her with reverence, was worthy of any regard. He attributed all the good feeling that might be in his nature to her alone, just as you might feel indebted to your ancestors for house and land; and he has declared to me that in the most terrible passages of his life, in the moment of shipwreck, or when the bullets were singing about his ears like hail, he has never felt the touch of fear, since he was sure that his mother was praying for him, and that God must needs listen to one so good and pious."

"Ay, that's all a woman can do is to pray,"

observed the young gentleman scornfully; who, although he did not possess the intelligence of Voltaire, unconsciously entertained the same opinions upon religious matters.

“If that were even so, Bentinck, it would be a good deal,” remarked his tutor gravely; “but women can do more than pray, when it is necessary. For one thing, they are braver than men, when their pity or affection is aroused, in daring the displeasure of the powerful. I should not be alive this day but for the heroism of one of that sex whom you so unreasonably despise. It was when Giuseppe and I were seized and thrown into prison while endeavouring to escape from Galeguay. You have seen these red lines round my wrists—they are the marks of the bracelets of the Spanish governor. My hands were fastened behind my back, and then I was made to hang by them to a rope from the ceiling. My chest seemed to be forced inward upon the heart and lungs, my arms to be wrenched from the sockets, and from beneath the nails of my swollen fingers the blood began to ooze—— But I beg your pardon, Miss



Evelyn; I am afraid I shock you with such horrors."

"Nay, Mr. Blake; if you have borne them, I can surely bear to listen to the recital," answered Evelyn with heightened colour.

"Yes, yes; I like this," urged Bentinck excitedly; "it is as good as *The Lives of the Highwaymen and Robbers*." And this was high praise, for the volume in question was the only one which even his foster-mother, Mary Ripson, had been able to convince the young fellow was worth reading.

"Giuseppe, however, suffered worse than I," continued Valentine modestly. "While similarly bound, he was let fall twice or thrice by means of a pulley, whereby his bones were dislocated. Then after such a quarter of an hour as seemed a lifetime of torment, the governor entered the cell in which we hung. 'If you will give up the names of those who helped you in your attempt to escape,' said he to Giuseppe, 'you shall be let down.' Never shall I forget the disdainful smile with which that face (which you have seen pictured in its quiet majesty) lifted itself up with pain and

difficulty, and gave its silent answer. The cowardly tyrant felt it like a stab, and left the room. For my own part, I soon fainted with the extremity of the pain; but Giuseppe was not so fortunate; it was two hours before his iron nerves gave way, and he became unconscious. We suffered more than that in Galeguay; but in the end we escaped, thanks to a noble lady, who dared the governor's vengeance, when no man was found to do so. If I had known her only, it would have been enough to convince me how great is woman's courage; but I have known many such. At Laguna, when the little republican flotilla of Rio Grande was driven on shore by the Brazilian fleet, and it was necessary to land our handful of men in hottest haste, the last person, save one, to reach the shore was a woman. Herself and her husband, with their own hands, set fire to the three vessels, by that time mere slaughter-houses, so terribly had we suffered from the enemy's shot; and by the light of the flames which they themselves had kindled they made their way to land in a small boat."

“And who was this heroic woman,” inquired Evelyn, “who was so worthy of her husband?”

“It was Giuseppe’s wife,” answered Valentine. “He had married her only a little time before, and their very honeymoon was passed in camp. He was our general and admiral in one at that time, and she was his right hand: we adored her almost as we did himself. —You have heard of the retreat from Moscow, Bentinck—a terrible history indeed, but there it was almost solely men who suffered. I have seen a retreat worse than that, where women and children had to march night and day through a dense and tangled forest. It was on the march from Buena-Vista to Lages, and the forest was called Las Antas. Our provisions were very scanty, the rain was incessant, and not a mile was passed without some unhappy child or woman sinking under the fatigue. The cavalry ate their horses, but a few good men saved theirs, in order to take up before them one of the poor little creatures whose mothers had already perished. Giuseppe carried his own child of three months old

suspended round his neck by a shawl, and endeavoured to keep life and warmth within him by breathing on the poor babe as it shivered in its ineffectual cradle—— But I think we have breakfasted full enough of horrors for this morning, Bentinck,” said Valentine, interrupting himself with effort. “See; it is fine now, and after the rain the fish will bite: let us take the boat, and go a-fishing.”

“I have broken the rods,” returned his pupil sullenly; “and although Evelyn has one locked up somewhere, she will not lend it me.—But tell me, did you ever manage to pay out that governor of Galeguay for what he did to you?”

“Yes, Bentinck. The whirligig of time generally manages, during warfare, to bring about our revenges. After the battle of San Antonio that very man fell into our hands, and was brought as a prisoner before Giuseppe. He trembled in every limb: none but a tyrant could have exhibited such an extremity of cowardice.”

“And I hope you tied his wrists, and jerked

him well before you hung him?" observed Bentinck eagerly.

"No; there was no end to serve by punishing the craven wretch; so Giuseppe, who never revenged his private wrongs, ordered him to be set at liberty. 'The punishment of fear upon meeting me,' said he smiling, 'was severe enough, I fancy.'"

The conversation for that morning ended; and tutor and pupil betook themselves to the lake, as the former had proposed; but as they were crossing the lawn towards the boat-house Evelyn called out to them from the house to stay a moment. Then hastening after them she gave into Valentine's hands a rod and line, saying: "This is my Cousin Charlie's rod, Mr. Blake, and has never been used since his death; but I think I am right in lending it to *you*."

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. MURPHY'S LETTER OF THANKS.

WHEN Valentine Blake had occupied his new post for about a month, he received the following letter from Mrs. Murphy, though not addressed (as we who are acquainted with that sagacious lady may well imagine) by her own hand:—

DEAR SIR,

I am obliged to you for your long and careful communication. I can now picture for myself exactly the state of affairs in my old home; and since it seems to prick your conscience to narrate such harmless details I will not press you to continue them. The likeness of young Bentinck to Miles Ripson, whom I


perfectly well remember, is curious enough when coupled with the fact of his being his foster-father ; and the similarity would probably seem more striking to me even than it does to you, since my recollection of Miles is when he was about Bentinck's age. I could not help smiling over your account of poor Dr. Warton. His unhappy fondness for strong liquors must indeed have reduced him to dotage before his time, since he could talk such nonsense to you over his cups. I am glad, I own, and agreeably disappointed, to hear that Evelyn Sefton has grown up so sensible a young woman. I always thought Mary Ripson a foolish person, whose small modicum of intelligence was perverted by an ill-judged course of reading, but (as you also remark) she is incapable of committing anything worse than folly. You tell me little concerning my brother Ernest and his wife : they are doubtless the same as they always were, making allowance for the hardening effects of years ; at the same time, I am very sensible of your carefulness to oblige me in forwarding all particulars, for which perhaps

it may be in my power at some future time to express my gratitude in a more solid manner. I will not, I again repeat, solicit any further favour from you of this sort, but have only to request (for your own sake), that if you should happen to see my son Claude in the neighbourhood of Sandalthwaite you will be careful not to exhibit any signs of recognition. He is about to spend his holiday in the Lake district, and I have no doubt that curiosity will lead him to the place where his mother spent several years of her maiden life, and where she first met his father. The same motives of precaution will of course lead you to destroy this communication.

I remain, dear sir, with many thanks from your obliged and faithfully,

SELINA MURPHY.


P.S.—I open my letter for a reason which you will very likely consider very insufficient: I ought, perhaps, to be sure that your own good feeling would render my mentioning the matter unnecessary: but be very careful not to repeat to others, even in joke, Dr. Warton's



drunken boast that he had my brother under his thumb. You must be aware from your own observation that such is not the case, and, in short, as you observe, that the old man was beside himself when he made the statement; but the repetition of such talk could not but do him harm at the Hall; and I have a genuine regard for the poor fellow—the remains of that *tendresse* for him, perhaps, which he always attributed to me.

Valentine Blake read this communication with an amount of attention which the writer could not certainly have anticipated. He had written Mrs. Murphy but one letter—though one of considerable length—in pursuance of his promise to put her in possession of the state of affairs at Sandalthwaite, and this was the reply. It astonished him in more than one respect. In the first place, it was final: Mrs. Murphy had unexpectedly given way (where a person of her character might be expected to have objected) to his reasons for discontinuing the correspondence. Therefore, whatever that might be, she had gained her

point in the transaction. He must have afforded her, without knowing it, some information of more value than mere gossip, which was all that he had intended to convey. There was scarcely a line in what he had written that Mr. Ernest Woodford might not have read himself: Valentine was incapable of reflecting upon his employer, and far less upon his wife; he had borne as lightly as possible even upon the shortcomings of Bentinck. With respect to him, he had written that the faults of his bringing-up seemed to lie with Mary Ripson rather than with his own father and mother; and that even now her well-meant devotion to him bore harmful fruit; but he had never used the expression attributed to him by Mrs. Murphy, that Mary was "incapable of committing anything worse than folly;" the idea of her committing anything worse had never entered into his head. Why, therefore, had Mrs. Murphy thought it necessary to defend the housekeeper from a prejudice which he had never entertained, under the pretence of confirming an opinion he had never expressed? This was not at all like Selina Murphy.



Still less in accordance with the character which that lady bore among all who were acquainted with her, including the tutor himself, was her solicitude for Herbert Warton's interests. Valentine's conscience smote him for having retailed to her a certain conversation which he and the doctor had had together when he was seeing the latter home, after what he euphoniously described as "rather a wet evening" at the Hall; but the whole affair had appeared so ridiculous that Valentine had enlarged upon it, glad to fill up space with a mere joke in a communication which was for the most part distasteful and embarrassing. He did not now remember with distinctness exactly what the doctor had said; but without doubt he had described the Black Squire—who had only a few minutes before been treating him little better than a dog—as a person who was completely under his control. It was the discrepancy between the fact and the boast which had tickled Valentine's fancy; but somehow the remembrance of it did not amuse him now, when coupled with the postscript before him. Was it pos-

sible that Warton had really any hold over the master of Dewbank Hall? Apart from the doctor's own assertion—and that while in a state of intoxication—the tutor had not seen the least sign of such a thing; on the contrary, Mr. Woodford often treated Warton with a disrespect unbecoming in a host towards his guest, and in a manner incompatible, as it would seem, with his being in any way in his power: while with Mrs. Woodford, it was true, he seemed to have great influence, but not greater than that which is generally enjoyed by a medical man over his patient. And yet this postscript of Mrs. Murphy's made Valentine uncomfortable, especially when he remembered that one of the things she had requested of him in Rhadegund Street was to favour her with any scraps of the doctor's gossip, "who could tell her more of what she wanted to know than a whole file of Cumberland newspapers." Had he (Valentine) then unwittingly hinted to Mrs. Murphy of something important? Otherwise, why this unlooked-for gratitude on her part?—nay, even a gratuitous suggestion of solid reward.

Something harshly exultant—a mocking tone of triumph—seemed to run through all the letter. Finally, Claude Woodford was coming down from London *incog*. If mere love of natural scenery was about to induce that young gentleman to visit Lakeland, which was much to be doubted, he could scarcely be given credit for that sentimental feeling for locality which, according to his mother, would bring her “Woody” to Sandalithwaite. Upon the whole, Valentine liked this piece of information least of all the communication conveyed.


Having no tutorial duties for that morning, since it happened to be Bentinck’s birthday, and that young gentleman had received permission to spend it in his own way, as a spectator of the sports at Carlisle, he went forth alone, with the letter in his pocket, chewing the cud of thought; and after some aimless wandering over the hill-tops, found himself overlooking Blennerdale, in the recesses of which lay the wad or black-lead which was worth its weight in silver. The valley looked very fair, clothed in its fresh

summer verdure; but the particular hill in which the treasure was found bore many a sign of havoc which wealth always plays with the simplicity of Nature. Scarce any of the original surface-soil had escaped the spade or the pick, and in a score of places a vast heap of clay or earth showed where an entrance had been effected into the hill itself. Only one, however, of all these burrows had been found to contain in any quantity the precious wad. Valentine, who had been taken over the place by Mr. Woodford, very much in the spirit of Hezekiah when lionizing the Babylonish envoy, could recognise the exact spot from where he stood—a huge black dot in the very centre of the hill-side—though it was no longer marked by the presence of the wad-workers, teeming like ants around the opening of their nest, and, like them, passing in and out in single file, there being only just room within the narrow passage for a man to pass his fellow. As a show-place, indeed, the wad-mine was not imposing: you went on in damp and darkness, save from the ray from your guide's lantern, perhaps not

very far ; but since you had to stoop throughout the transit, and ever and anon stumbled against the props with which it was necessary to shore up the sides and roof, the expedition seemed a long one. Your reward was first to have pointed out to you the rich black seams, which would perhaps have glittered could the sun have shone on them ; and secondly, the unspeakable relief of finding yourself, when all was over, safe in the open air. You might then consider yourself a favoured person if you were not subjected to the operation of searching, from which no one connected with the mine, except George Adams the manager, who had accompanied his principal and Valentine upon the expedition in question, was exempt.

But there was no longer a reason for these precautions. Mr. Woodford had put his determination into effect, and closed the wad-mine, following the example sometimes set by the proprietors of the Keswick lead-mine, in order to prevent the cheapening of that rare commodity. There was not a single workman to be seen upon the whole hillside ; nor did the

echoes which usually repeated the strokes of the pick from every part return any sound. The huts, too, where the men were housed at the foot of the hill, were all abandoned; and the door of the tool-house, situated upon the hill itself, not far from the adit of the mine, was closed; the smoke that issued from the chimney of the manager's house was the only sign of human habitation to be seen. Its contrast with the busy scene he had last witnessed here made the quiet seem even more complete than it really was, and besides, there was that stillness in the summer air which is the herald of a storm. With all his experience of the solitudes of Nature, Valentine felt that he had rarely looked upon a spot so lonely. When the rain began to send forth its skirmishers in the shape of such large cool drops as promised a serious downpour, the tutor was still at too great a distance from the deserted settlement to arrive there with a dry skin; he made, therefore, for a rude outhouse of unmortared stone that stood not far off, and endeavoured to shelter himself under its projecting slates; but that protection being insufficient, he was



driven to commit an act of burglary : the door defied his efforts, but he broke open the rusty padlock which confined the windowless shutters, and having climbed within, closed them against the fury of the storm. Then seated on an empty barrel that stood in the place, he took out Mrs. Murphy's letter, and read it once again, which even in that semi-darkness it was now easy for him to do ; and as he did so, doubt and suspicion—though he scarcely knew of what—clouded more and more his mind.

He had been sitting for some time immersed in thought, when suddenly a sound struck upon his ear that roused him at once from his reverie, and caused him to look up at the closed shutters with the utmost extremity of surprise. A man's voice was no such wonder in Blennerdale, and it was likely enough that a man should shelter himself under the outhouse eaves as *he* had done : it was the tones of the voice which struck him with such astonishment, for they were those, he felt convinced, of his pupil, Bentinck Woodford, whom he had beheld with his own eyes set out (only a few minutes before he himself left Dewbank Hall) in his dogcart

for Carlisle. For the moment, he thought it was by no means out of the range of possibility that the young gentleman might have used deception with his father, and planned some expedition elsewhere; but then he reflected, leisurely as he had walked over the hills, that that was so much the shorter way that no wheels could have arrived in Blennerdale within the time or near it. Perplexed and astonished, he moved cautiously to the window, and through a chink in the shutters perceived two men, doubtless taking shelter, as he had supposed, beneath the eaves. The one was George Adams the manager; the other (whom he had seen upon his visit to the mine, but had not spoken with) he recognised at the first glance, notwithstanding that his back was turned towards him, as Miles Ripson.

CHAPTER X.

THE MANAGER'S SECRET.

"I WAS coming to your house, Adams," said Miles in hoarse dogged tones, very similar to those so familiar to the tutor's ear, except for their strong Cumbrian smack, which we may as well omit; "but since I have met you on the road I may just as easily say my say where we are."

"Better to say it here, Miles Ripson," answered the other; "better to meet you anywhere than under my own roof-tree."

Here Miles turned round to give his companion an ugly look of scorn and hatred; and as Valentine caught his features in close profile, it seemed to him as though he had slept some Rip Van Winkle sleep of twenty years, and

was standing face to face with Bentinck Woodford.

"And why not see me in your fine house, George Adams?" inquired the miner with a sneer. "Is it because, half a lifetime ago, a pretty girl thought me a properer man than yourself?"

"No, Miles, it is not on that account," replied the other, speaking with forced calmness.

"Ah, you're afraid of losing your dignity, perhaps," continued Ripson bitterly, "if you, the manager, are seen in confidential talk with a common workman; though, let me tell you, I have had more money to spend in my time than you will ever scrape and save out of your salary, however large you may think it."

"I know all that, Miles; I know you have spent a great deal of money—other people's as well as your own. But my house is the house of an honest man, and I don't wish any rogue to set foot in it."

"Rogues go to prison, George Adams, and I have never been there, though I could send some people thither just by opening my lips."

There was a long pause; then, "What is it you want?" asked George with averted face.

"There now, you're getting more sensible as well as more neighbourly," rejoined Miles with a sneer. "Well, since the Black Squire has turned us all off yonder at a week's notice, I want some sort of a house to live in. I'm not particular, you know, except so far that it must be rent-free."

"Mr. Woodford has particularly ordered that all the workmen's houses shall be closed; he wishes that nobody should have any excuse for remaining in the neighbourhood of the mine."

"Afraid of the wad being taken, is he?" observed Miles coolly. "I thought you had made fast the adit."

"Yes; that has been done."

"Then why be so particular about keeping the huts empty, Mr. Manager?"

"That is my employer's business, not mine, Ripson. You must lodge at the inn, as you used to do, or, at all events, not here. I cannot, without permission, let you stay on yonder, and I will not."

"Your orders, however, only refer to the huts, I suppose?"

"Of course not; but there is no other dwelling-house in Blennerdale."

"No; but there is the tool-house, on the Fell itself; and that's where I mean to live, Mr. Manager, until the Black Squire sets us to work again."

From red to pale, from pale to livid white, and then to passionate red again, turned the manager's cheeks. "That you shall never do, Miles," answered he. "I have shut my eyes too much. I do believe that the last wad we lost found its way—if you did not put it there yourself—into your pockets. I despise myself when I think that I have so long kept silence, and thereby become a partaker in your crime."

"And yet not in the spoil," resumed the miner with a sneer. "That does seem hard indeed. Having such a very tender conscience, Mr. Manager, it is strange that when you had taken the queen's shilling and wore her scarlet——"

"Take you care, Miles Ripson," broke in the other with smothered fury. "When I think

of what I have suffered at your hands a devil strives to rise within me, that takes all the good I own to keep him down. If you drive me once so far that I take you by the throat, God help you !”

“ Since the subject seems to be so distressing to you,” resumed Miles coldly, “ although I care not for your anger one penny-piece, we will speak of it no longer. Besides, you know already all that I could say upon the matter, having, I daresay, thought over it once or twice yourself in all its bearings. For my part, I do not blame you even. The law, to be sure, takes a black view of the offence in question ; and if the thing were known the consequences would be serious enough. To have to give up one’s pleasant dwelling-house, with everything within it that a man need want—except a wife— and exchange it for a prison-cell : that would be hard indeed. Then, to be called bad names—I will not mention the word, for one cannot be too careful of such secrets—after having been used to respect from folks beneath one (such as I), and to have confidence reposed in one by our

employer; to be made a byword of in the place where we had held up our head so high these seventeen years: all this would be hard to bear; and yet"—here he changed his mocking tone to savage menace—"it will have to be borne—mark that, George Adams—it and much more, unless I get the thing I want."

The manager gasped for breath, as though engaged in some severe physical struggle, and loosened the knot of the handkerchief about his throat.

"Tell me the truth, man, if truth be in you," answered he with effort: "why is it that you ask me this, Miles Ripson?"

"It is my whim, that's all," returned Miles with a malevolent chuckle. "When one has power, one likes to use it—or at least *I* do—even though there be nothing to be gained. Perhaps I am tired of living at the *Wrestler's Arms* when not at work here; perhaps I want to save money by occupying yonder hut, in order that I may sooner return to my own house, which Mary Harrison brought me at her marriage; you remember Ander Nook. There is no end to the reasons a man has for

putting his enemy to an inconvenience. You may give which you like to any who ask questions about it, but yonder house I mean to have."

"I can only guess at one reason—unless it be as you say, the mere annoyance to myself, you devil—that sets you on to this," replied George slowly. "You design to steal the wad. Now, let me warn you—although I fall short of my duty in letting you know it—that no such attempt can by any possibility succeed. Not only has the adit been closed up, but sealed, and it is to be visited by the Kendal agent daily, so that it is impossible that an entrance can be effected without immediate discovery."

"And if I were taken in the fact you would be somewhat compromised, eh, Mr. Manager?" answered Ripson: "that is well thought of. However, you may set your mind at ease thus far: I have no such intention as that with which you credit me. I have as honest a dislike of the inside of a jail as you yourself, George Adams. So, let us consider this little matter settled without more ado. You are

good enough, in return for my shutting my mouth, to let me occupy this tool-house—which is of neither use nor profit to your employer for the present, and in which he has not forbidden you to place a tenant. Good. I shall take up my quarters there to-morrow.—See, the rain is over which brought us together, and I am going to take a look at my new residence. You were walking in the same direction, I think. What!—you have had enough of my companionship? Well, that is uncivil, particularly as we are about to be such close neighbours for the future. The only two men in Blennerdale should be upon better terms. However, just as you please, Mr. Manager; and do not hesitate, for my sake, I beg, to keep a sharp eye upon the wad.”

With a low grating laugh the miner turned upon his heel, and took his way towards the deserted works. The manager stood watching him for a few minutes with white lips, that murmured anything but prayer, then slowly moved away in the contrary direction.

“Now, I wonder does Selina Murphy hold the strings of this mystery also?” ejaculated

Valentine, relighting his pipe, which had gone out during this interview ; “or does the air of Sandalthwaite engender secrets in all who inhabit the place ? If George Adams is really in that black fellow’s power, I pity him. ‘The queen’s shilling and the queen’s scarlet,’ said he ; now, what did he mean by that ?—Ah, I think I see.”

Emerging from his place of shelter, and making the shutters fast behind him as well as he could, Valentine looked cautiously about him : a dip in the valley hid Ripson from his gaze ; but he could see the manager toiling up the peat-path by which he himself had come, as a heavy heart makes the most agile limbs to seem to toil. It was not fatigue that was oppressing him, for when he reached the summit of the steep ascent, he did not halt for a single instant, but plodded on out of sight, quite unconscious that Valentine was already pressing fast upon his footsteps. Nay, when he came up with him upon the noiseless mountain-turf, and touched him, George did not even so much as look behind.

“You have got what you want,” exclaimed

he, shaking himself free, "and you had better not mock me with more words."

"It is not the person you are thinking of, Mr. Adams," said the tutor in the grave but winning tones peculiar to him; "it is I, Valentine Blake."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Blake," answered the other respectfully. "I have just parted with a man upon ill terms, and I thought that you were he, and bent upon annoying me further."

"No, indeed. He was your enemy, but I am your friend, and will prove myself to be so, if you will only trust me."

"Thank you, sir," returned the manager dryly; "I am sure you are very kind. —I hope the squire and his family are well. Mr. Bentinck, I suppose, is gone to the felling at Carel; he dearly loves the sport."

"Yes. You used to be a wrestler once, yourself, did you not, Mr. Adams?"

"Years ago, sir. I have not tried a fall since——"

"Since you threw Miles Ripson in the ring at Sandalthwaite," said Valentine quietly, as

the other hesitated. "I have heard all about that, you know; and how he married Mary Harrison, although she was engaged to a better man; and how he treated her, and wasted her little property; and yet, with all his luck, he is but a common workman, and you are his master—although in another sense, unfortunately, he seems to be yours."

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Blake."

"Yes, you do, George. It is bad to have secrets such as compel one to tell lies. You had better be frank with me, my friend. I am one, I assure you, who can feel for an honest man who is somehow or other obliged to favour Miles Ripson."

"It was not I who gave him his place again at the mine, Mr. Blake, which people talked about so, after what had happened with him and the wad before: it was the squire himself, or rather his lady."

"Oh, Mrs. Woodford exerted herself for him, did she?" answered Valentine thoughtfully.

"I was not, however, referring to that, but to your letting him have the tool-house on the Fell."

The manager stopped short, and staggered, as though he had received a blow.

"Great Heaven! Mr. Blake, who told you that? Has he had the insolence to boast so soon——"

"No, George," interrupted the tutor very gravely. "I should think, considering what we suppose he has in view, that it would be his interest, at least as much as yours, to conceal the matter. What indiscretion can you have committed, unhappy man, that has placed you in the power of a wretch like him—indiscretion that causes you to become his partner in a scheme of robbery?—Nay, George, it must have been *a crime*."

"No sir, no," answered the manager eagerly; "you need not think that; although, indeed, my punishment, if it were discovered, would be that of a criminal. Since you know so much, Mr. Blake, I will tell you all; but do not reveal my secret, unless you wish to see me dead. I could not bear that he should tell her of my disgrace; and it would wring her own heart too—yes, I do think it would—since I incurred it all for Mary's sake, and all, ah sir,

in vain." The manager cast himself upon the ground, and hid his face for a little without speaking, while Valentine stood by regarding him with pitying eyes.

"It was long, long ago, sir; near twenty years ago, when I came up on survey in these parts, as a Sapper and Miner. I did my duty as a soldier, as I have writings to witness; but soldiering was not to my taste. When I came among the mountains hereabout it seemed like heaven to me; and I thought if I could only live here I should be the happiest man on earth. (I have lived here a long while now, alas! and found it very different; but then I was young and foolish.) But more than that, Mr. Blake; I was in love. You may not know what that is; God grant you never may, if the end of it is to be the same as mine; but I felt as though I would have sold my very soul to wed Mary Harrison. And she loved *me*—or at least she told me so, and I believed her—in return. I was ordered south, and had to leave her; but on the eve of my departure she promised to marry me. Never in any heart was despair so mingled

with delight as in mine that day. For a man of my years—I am just forty, sir,” continued George simply—“to talk in this fashion may seem very foolish; but unless I tell you the whole truth I shall seem worse than I am. Some can love one woman, and yet love another at the same time almost as well; and some can love and lose, and forget or console themselves with another; but I gave my whole heart into Mary’s keeping, sir, and, Heaven forgive me, she has got it still. Well, we two plighted troth: she was to write, and I was to write, often, constantly: and when I had saved enough money for my discharge, or she should be in a position to purchase it (I saw nothing degrading in that, sir; no, nor, I confess, in anything which might bring our marriage about), then I was to come back to Cumberland, to claim her as my bride. I went away; but though I wrote, as I had promised, I never got one letter in reply—no, not a line. What I suffered from that silence can never be told, sir—never. At last it grew unbearable, and I resolved to find out for myself whether my love was dead or false. I could not obtain

leave of absence, and indeed my mode of life, always distasteful to me, had become so hateful that I determined to quit it altogether. We were stationed at a southern port, and I so contrived my desertion that it was supposed I had gone off to America by a steam-ship. At all events, I knew it was in the highest degree improbable that any one should come to look for me in Sandalthwaite. I forgot that there is no spot so solitary but that a man's conscience keeps him company there. I came—and, since you seem to know it, I may spare myself the telling you what I found. It is this man, Miles Ripson, who then robbed me of all that I held dear on earth, who now persecutes me, as you have hinted. How he came to find that I was a deserter—for I gave out that I had got my discharge—the devil, who prompts his every act, alone can tell. Perhaps he only guessed my crime, and taxed me with it at a venture; but he knows it now, and you are aware, it seems, how he uses his knowledge. You have heard my story, Mr. Blake—if I have done wrong, am I not also to be pitied?"

"Yes; certainly," said Valentine, with feel-

ing; "but I have been a soldier myself, and you must therefore not expect that I should acquit you of deceit, undutifulness, and breach of faith."

"You cannot despise me, sir, so much as I despise myself," answered the manager humbly.

"I do not despise you, George. We all require allowances to be made for us by our fellow-creatures, and still more by the Father of us all. But would you not commit a fresh wrong to hide the consequences of the evil already done? In permitting Miles Ripson to occupy the tool-house are you not giving him facilities for robbing your common employer? What does that conscience say, George, of which you spoke a while ago?"

"I have no choice, sir, between that and degradation," replied the manager slowly. "But perhaps it would be better to let him do his worst. God help me! Besides, if you have got to suspect the thing, others may do so by the same means."

"Scarcely that," replied Valentine frankly. "I took shelter within the outhouse where you and Ripson were standing, and thereby acci-

dentally overheard your talk. If it had not been for the rain, or if even the wind had set my way, and you had chanced to smell my tobacco, I should have known nothing of all this."

"What! were you smoking, sir?" cried George, with a surprise that for the moment rapt him from his private woes. "Then you, and I, and Miles were never so near to death as we were within this hour! That outhouse contains the powder we use for blasting in the mine, and is always fast locked up on that account."

"I noticed some black specks upon the barrel on which I was sitting," said Valentine calmly; "but I took them for bits of wad. Since life has been thus lent to us, let us spend it as the Lender would have us do. For the present, since the precautions you mentioned have been taken for the security of the wad, I see no harm in letting matters remain as they are: but give me the date and place of your desertion, George."

"O sir, what for?"

"That I may put the matter in the hands of the proper authorities.—Do not fear—or, at

least, fear nothing so much as a crime unatoned for. I have some influence—or at least I have friends who have—with those who will be your judges in this matter. After so long a time, and under the peculiar circumstances, your case will, I trust, be dealt with leniently.”

“Nay, sir,” cried George, with passion, “but this is not treating me as a gentleman should. To worm my secret out, and then betray it! Who are you, sir, who thus manage other folk’s affairs for them, whether they will or no? And how can I be sure that you have the wish, even if you have the power, to save me?”

Valentine Blake smiled gravely, in his gentle fashion, and leaning forward, whispered a word or two into the manager’s ear.

“If I have wormed a secret out of you,” added the tutor smiling, as the other regarded him with distended eyes, and every symptom of extreme astonishment, “I have now given you one of my own in return, as earnest of my good intentions towards you: see, therefore, you keep it faithfully. Hush, hush! Not a word about it even to myself, man. It’s a long

story, and you shall hear it all some day, but not at present.—You will trust me now, George Adams, will you not ?”

“Yes, sir, I will indeed,” replied the manager, gazing into the bearded face with reverent awe, and grasping his hand with vehemence, as though to convince himself of the reality of what he saw. “I have said that I would never believe another fellow-creature’s oath again ; but I do believe your word.”

CHAPTER XI.

NEWS OF WAR.

READER, have you never made one at some pompous dinner-party, where the viands are good and plentiful, but the talk is slack and not worth hearing, and but for your good fortune in being neighbour to the only pleasant person in the company, you would have wished yourself, I do not say at your Club—for it is probable there are few dinner-parties whereat you would not do *that*—but even at your bachelor lodgings with a chop and a pint of stout? The master of the house appreciates your conversational powers, and has even asked you, you shrewdly suspect, for the very purpose of making the entertainment “go off,” which even now hangs fire like a damp squib.

The company acknowledge your mental superiority, although your opinions may be too "advanced" or high-flying to be grasped by their dull and sordid intellects; and yet you feel that if it was not for that plump and pleasant little neighbour of yours in white muslin, the whole affair would be utterly insupportable. This was something like the position in which Valentine Blake found himself after some months' residence at Dewbank Hall. He was as popular there, in a negative sort of way, as it was possible for any man to be among such people. Where there is no Love there is generally but little Liking, and neither his host nor hostess were capable of even the latter spiritual effort; but Mr. Woodford was well convinced that the man he had engaged to be his son's tutor was doing his work in a conscientious manner, and he showed his sense of it by an expressive silence. I doubt whether any word of praise—save self-congratulation—had ever passed the lips of Ernest Woodford. He was one of those who consider that all men are bound to do their duty towards *them* without acknowledgment,


and that their own duty mainly consists in finding fault when it is not done ; the absence, therefore, of reproof from the Black Squire was, to a well-constituted mind, equivalent to the highest commendation.

Mrs. Woodford was even more demonstrative : she had roused herself twice or thrice from her habitual lethargy to say a few words of thanks to Valentine for the manifest improvement that was apparent in Master Bentinck. She lifted her heavy eyelids and saw, with what would have been surprise in another, that the young man now made his appearance in the drawing-room before dinner, and with clean hands, instead of coming straight from the stable to the dinner-table ; he would speak when he was spoken to, and ceased to keep up a certain dissatisfied growl, with which he used to favour his friends and relatives when his father was out of hearing. The bear was certainly being licked into shape, though whether the system pursued had affected him beyond externals was still doubtful. Valentine, always ready to believe the best, was sanguine about this ; Mr. Woodford, on the

other hand, was suspicious and cynical. He allowed Bentinck behaved himself better than of yore. "But you don't know that boy as *I* know him, Mr. Blake: you may depend upon it there is some reason—and not a good one—lying at the bottom of this improvement: you flatter yourself it will prove deep and lasting; I tell you it is temporary and shallow. Now, mark my words, sir: I don't know what mischief it is he's planning; but Ben is overreaching you at this very moment." Valentine smiled at this, but was obliged to own to himself that he had spoken more hopefully about his pupil than his own convictions quite warranted. He was well aware that he had not succeeded in winning the stubborn lad's regard, though, thanks to their first meeting, as much as to anything that had subsequently taken place, he had managed to extort his respect. Not even the brutal and lawless refuse allegiance to the dauntless heart when coupled with the strong right hand; and it was with the intention of increasing his means of influence that Valentine narrated to the lad those occurrences of warfare and adventure in

his former life, to which his own natural humility would otherwise have forbidden him to refer. He felt little better than a pitiful boaster, when sometimes, in the description of some stirring scene of peril and combat, Miss Evelyn would glide into the pupil-room, and beg of him not to cease, for that what he was saying interested her to the full as much as her cousin Bentinck. If anything like the feeling which grew up between Desdemona and the Moor arose in consequence of these stirring narratives in Evelyn Sefton's bosom, it was not, to all appearance, reciprocated by the tutor. Whether mindful of the tacit promise he had given to Mr. Woodford, or because his heart was in reality pledged to another, he made no sign of love. His behaviour to his employer's niece was gentle, chivalric—even tender; but so it was to all women, including Mrs. Woodford herself. But he unquestionably took pleasure in Evelyn's society, without which life at Dewbank Hall would indeed have been melancholy enough.

Among other plans for the amelioration of his impracticable pupil, the influence of the



Press had been brought to bear upon him, as though he were some social evil. History and geography in the abstract the young gentleman could not be induced to imbibe, but Valentine imagined that some interest might be evoked for them out of the events of the time. The period—that of 1848—was pregnant with events. The irrepressible nationalities were asserting themselves, and the peoples “barking for the thrones of kings.” Wars and rumours of wars were arising on every hand in Europe, and the theological prophets were appointing a new and early date for the end of all things; a time when tyrants began to remember that they had a crick in their necks, and to hasten to render themselves constitutional, until the trouble should be overpast, and they might be able to reconsider the matter with judicial calm. It was curious to mark the contrast between tutor and pupil, reader and listener, as they sat with (the only thing they had in common) the great broad sheet of the *Times* between them—the one so full of enthusiasm, of passionate hope, of belief in the might of Right; the other without one gleam of

interest in the great motives of action that influenced either side, but not indifferent to the exciting details. The conflagration of Europe ranked in Bentinck's mind with a highly-spiced police report.

"I should like to be at a sack," observed he frankly upon one occasion, when Valentine, with burning cheeks, was reciting some horrible act of Austrian repression in Lombardy, the treating of some defenceless but suspected city as though it were a town taken by assault.

"You don't know what you say, Bentinck," replied the tutor with grave severity. "Such a scene transforms even the bravest men to brutes. I remember when we were cut off by the Imperialists in the Lagunes of St. Catharina: their vessels were as five to one, and they had seized the only channel which gave access to the sea. It was only a question of time, when they should drive us, as the net drives the fish, into a corner of our narrow prison, there to capture or destroy us. Then Giuseppe put in practice a stratagem which another hero, Robert Bruce, had taught him centuries

before. He caused huge carriages to be built, very strong though very rude, and placing our ships upon them, dragged them, with a hundred oxen yoked to each, through a long ravine by a road half-land half-water. It was a three days' journey, notwithstanding that the masts were taken out, so that our vessels scarcely looked like ships at all. The fatigue and toil were excessive, but we reached the sea at last. Then, when the very existence of our little fleet was denied or discredited, we sailed down upon a Brazilian stronghold. We were by that time commanded by another general of superior rank to him who had so miraculously brought us out of peril; our men were burning to revenge their recent hardships, and the town was given up to pillage; God pity and forgive us all!" A look of indescribable compassion and horror came over Valentine Blake, and he passed his hand over his eyes, as though to efface some terrible vision.

"And what did you do?" inquired Bentinck with considerable interest. "Did you shoot anybody?"

"I? Yes, I shot one of my own men,"

returned Valentine hoarsely; "and yet I would do so again, just as I would shoot a wild beast, if——. Hush; here is your cousin."

"News, news!" cried Evelyn, entering the room in haste with that day's newspaper, just arrived, and streaming from her hand like a banner: "the Austrians have fled from Milan!"

"Are you certain, Evelyn?—Miss Sefton, I mean," exclaimed the tutor, starting to his feet.

"Nay, Mr. Blake," returned she smiling, "I am not 'our own correspondent,' but certainly it is so stated here. Radetsky left the city at midnight. All Lombardy is aglow with war. Here, you can read it yourself."

Valentine seized the paper with tremulous fingers, and ran his eyes down the long double-leaded column with eager haste. Presently they caught a particular sentence, and straightway shone with joyous light, then softened, as they glanced towards Evelyn, into something like regret.

"Bentinck," cried he excitedly, "you must have a holiday this morning; I can think of nothing else besides this glorious news."

The young gentleman nodded approval, and without waiting for further permission escaped through the glass door that opened on the lawn.

“Mr. Blake,” said the girl with quiet earnestness, “why have you never told us your friend’s name, but always called him Giuseppe?”

“Because that *is* his name, Miss Evelyn,” answered Valentine smiling, “and the one by which I always knew him.”

“Yes, but not the one by which he was known to others. He has started for Milan, has he not? It is Garibaldi.”

“It is Garibaldi,” repeated the tutor in reverent tones. “I could not have borne to hear his name coupled with unworthy prejudices—misapprehensions. Forgive me, Miss Evelyn.”

“And you are going to join him, Mr. Blake,” continued she, without heeding his last words. “I read it in your face.”

“Yes, my sword is vowed to him. My duty”—pointing to the sentence with his finger—“lies this way.”

"Yes, and your wishes," answered Evelyn.
"Come; be frank, and own it."

"Would Miss Sefton desire that my wishes should lie apart from my duty?" answered the tutor gravely. "No; I am sure she would not."

"And yet *you* have no country's wrongs to redress, Mr. Blake."

"That is true. I have no country, no home, no friends even— Great Heaven! what is this?"


Pale as a corpse, Evelyn would have fallen on the ground, had Valentine not received her in his arms. He had not noticed that for the last few minutes she had only supported herself by aid of the writing-table, and that the words she spoke had been uttered in a hoarse unnatural key. He could not help touching her white cheek, which was as cold as ice, and as he did so the very contact seemed to set the blood flowing through her pale blue veins. She opened her large eyes, and then blushed crimson.

"I am so sorry to have been so foolish," said she with difficulty, as he placed her tenderly upon the couch. "I have never fainted in all

my life before. I suppose it must have been the heat.—Thank you ; yes, I should like a glass of water.”

The tutor flew for the refreshment in question, and sent it by the hand of Mary Ripson : perhaps he wished to relieve Evelyn from embarrassment ; perhaps he did not like to trust himself again so near his employer’s niece, under such interesting circumstances, notwithstanding the pre-engagement of his own affections. He did not even tarry in the house, but took a long walk over the hills, from which he came back only just in time for dinner. A visitor was being lionised over the little church as he passed the door in the morning ; and on his return, perceiving the sexton working in his garden, Valentine called to him over the low wall to ask him about the stranger.

“He’s a Mr. Fosbrook,” returned the old man peevishly ; “and not much count, I should think. I showed him both church and churchyard, and he only gave me a threepenny-piece. I hope he’ll be more liberal to Dr. Warton.”



"Why so? Is the gentleman ill?"

"Well, he *says* so," continued the old man in his grumbling key; "although I can't say as I see much the matter with him. He's a-staying at the *Wrestler's Arms*—a pretty place for an invalid, to be sure—and when the doctor went to see him this afternoon he asked him to dine wi' him. But he'll not give him much of dinner, you may take your oath; and I shouldn't wonder if he never gave him a fee. However, there's one thing," added the old fellow with a leer: "whatever Muster Warton gets for his advice, it'll be more than it's worth."

"The doctor's bad to-day, is he?" returned Valentine carelessly, although he was well aware that the cynical sexton was not referring to any temporary ailment.

"Well, he's no worse than usual, as I know on," was the gruff reply. "But he's getting as peevish and fretful as a child. He'll make no old bones, he won't. I shall have to make his bed for him before six months are out—ay, or sooner than that."

The cloud which sat on Valentine's brow

when he left the Hall had thinned a little during his walk, but now grew darker even than before. On his way out he had caught a glimpse of Mr. Fosbrook's face, and thought it was not altogether strange to him; but other reflections had occupied him, to the exclusion of that circumstance. Then suddenly, as he neared the church, again a suspicion had flashed upon his mind, and caused him to interrogate the sexton. The old man's replies convinced him—if he had needed conviction—that Mr. Claude Woodford Murphy had given way to those sentimental emotions at which his mother had hinted so far as to visit Sandalthwaite in person, although (perhaps to avoid the soft impeachment) he was doing so under an assumed name.

CHAPTER XII.'

THE LIGHT IN THE CHURCHYARD.

SUCH a tempest of rain and equinoctial winds swept the valley on the evening that Valentine made the discovery narrated in the last chapter that not a villager stirred out of doors. The raindrops beating in sheets against the windows, and the roaring of the fir-trees as they bowed reluctantly before the gale, made up the only music heard in Dewbank Hall that night; for Evelyn did not, as was her wont, take her place at the piano in the drawing-room—word was sent that Mrs. Woodford felt more indisposed than usual, and that her niece would remain upstairs to nurse her.

“A nice household I’ve got,” observed her husband savagely, upon receiving this intelli-

gence; "not only a sick wife, which is worse than none at all, but one that always wants somebody else to look after her, and that somebody the very one that *I* want. She knows that music is about the only thing I care for—but what of that? Evelyn must watch her going to sleep, it seems; and I'm to be left with nobody to amuse me—at least, of course, Mr. Blake, I'm very glad of your company; but if you were a servant instead of a tutor it would be just the same: while, as for Bentinck, he's off to the stable the moment he has had enough to eat and drink. Mrs. Woodford might just as well have presented me with a colt as with that boy."

The main advantage, however, which Mr. Woodford was wont to derive from the harmonies of the pianoforte was upon this occasion made up to him by Nature; for at his usual time, and in his usual place—the drawing-room sofa—the Black Squire dropped asleep. Glad enough to be thus released from his task of companionship, and left free to grapple with his own pressing thoughts, Valentine seized his waterproof cap and cloak,

and stepped out into the roaring night. Under any circumstances this war-worn, travel-tried man paid little attention to weather: if he wished to take the air, the "wet," for which even the Hardy among stay-at-home folk entertain such genuine respect, never stood in his way; but to-night the strife of the elements was in unison with his own contending emotions, and the heavy rain and furious wind beat gratefully against his fevered forehead. It would not have been easy even for a native of the place to have found his way, in that bewildering storm, through the pitch darkness of the avenue; but Valentine Blake steered himself so well that he reached the open road without the least mishap. It was late enough for all of the good people at Sandalthwaite (who kept much better hours than the Black Squire) to have retired to rest; but at all events there was only a single light to be seen in the direction of the *Wrestler's Arms*, and which he rightly concluded to stream from the spare parlour (there was but one) on the upper floor, at present in the occupation of Mr. Woodford Murphy, and where he was

probably at this moment supplying his only too willing guest, the doctor, with fiery potations. But although there was much that was suggestive and even suspicious to Valentine in the meeting of those two men, his mind was at present occupied with more important, or at least more personal matters: his promise given to Garibaldi that he would join him whenever the time might come for Italy to draw her sword; his duty to Mr. Woodford, with respect to throwing up so suddenly the charge he had undertaken in Bentinck; and a certain other question, in which his conscience was still more troubled, and inclination and obligation at open war—these considerations occupied him wholly as he strode with rapid though aimless steps through the unheeded storm. Still, his faculties, trained in the school of the forest and the prairie, were fully alive to external things, and he was brought to a halt as abruptly as though he were looking for nothing else, by a flash of light from the churchyard.

It was not lightning, for although almost as swift and sudden, it did not light up the land-

scape; but it was far brighter and more quickly quenched than any gleam which could have come from the old sexton's horn-lantern. Valentine Blake was by no means a superstitious man—fear in any shape, so far as himself was concerned, was quite unknown to him; but a light in Sandalthwaite churchyard upon such a night did seem somewhat eerie and uncanny even to him. He did not waste time, however, in guessing what it might be, but hastened his steps, which were already bent in that direction, towards the spot from which it proceeded. He knew the exact locality, because the light had been flashed *down* upon him, and the only elevated place in the little cluster of houses which he was approaching was the God's Acre. This was surrounded on two sides by the stream that issued from the lake, and which had now become a furious torrent, rolling the huge boulders over and over in their rocky bed with such a din that no one thereabouts could have been aware of the approach of Valentine as he crossed the high stone bridge, even had he been a horse-soldier at full gallop. Without troubling him-

self to feel for the gate, which he knew was somewhere upon his right hand, he vaulted over the low churchyard wall, and then remained motionless, feeling sure that he should presently see the light again, since it seemed improbable that the person who carried it should have seen all he needed in a single flash. Nor was he disappointed. Scarcely had he taken up his position when the dark-lantern, for such it was, was once more unshaded, and this time for a sufficient period to let him see the immediate objects upon which it was turned. These were almost close beside him—so close that he was himself within only a few feet of the broad line of light—and consisted of the following: item, a little open grave, from which the turf had apparently been just removed; item, a duodecimo coffin, the nails whereof, rusty as they were, glinted in the rays of the lantern; and item, Mr. Woodford Murphy leaning on a spade that afforded a very convenient prop to his trembling limbs.

“There, that’s the box!” exclaimed the light-holder, invisible of course to Valentine, but the husky indistinctness of whose tones

announced him for Herbert Warton as surely as if the noonday sun were shining full upon him. "You have only to take the lid off, Mr. Fosbrook, and you will find I have not deceived you."

"I had rather not," returned the shrinking youth, in his thin and quavering voice. "I am not used to this kind of thing."

"Damme, sir, and neither am I," returned the doctor with irritation. "I am no more a body-snatcher than you are. If the look of the coffin is sufficient for you, well and good; you may put it back again as soon as you like. But don't stand staring at it as though it would bite you till half the village is brought out at it too."

Thus adjured, the unfortunate "Woody"—ghastly pale and terror-stricken, and yet with a certain greed in his weak eyes that, coupled with his occupation, gave him a strong resemblance to a Ghoul—knelt down upon the sodden earth, and strove to insert a corner of the spade so as to prize up the coffin-lid; but his trembling hands could effect nothing.

"What a lily-livered young rogue it is!"

exclaimed the doctor impatiently, after watching these impotent efforts for nearly a minute. "Here, give *me* the spade, and do you hold the lantern."

And now the light began to assume an appearance truly Will-of-the-wisp like, and one which might easily have been taken by the scientific for an "exhalation," or by the superstitious for a "corpse-candle." In the doctor's fingers its gleam had been far from steady; but in those of the young visitor from the metropolis it wavered this way and that, so that Valentine looked upon his own discovery as certain, albeit he was very unwilling that it should take place before he had found out what strange thing the two confederates might have in view.

"Confound you, put it *down*," roared the doctor (they both had to speak at the top of their voices, although they were scarcely a yard apart). "One would think it was St. Anthony's Fire, instead of a dark-lantern. It is very fortunate that you are not the only fool in the world, or we should certainly have the sexton down upon us. But he too believes

in ghosts, and would scarcely set foot in his own churchyard after nightfall. Fancy!"—here the doctor paused in his sacrilegious work, and laughed within himself, exactly as Valentine had often seen him do when about to tell some humorous anecdote—"when a dog gets in here at night, Mr. Fosbrook, and scratches at a grave; or if a storm, like this, tears away the turf a bit—as it will be seen to have done to-morrow morning—the idea of this good man is that it is a sign that the folks below are in want of company, and that there will be a death in the parish within twelve hours. Now, ain't that odd?"

"I wish you would make haste, sir," exclaimed poor Woody fervently. "The longer we stay here the greater risk we run."

"Pooh, pooh, Mr. Fosbrook. There is no risk so long as you have got your skin full of good liquor. No man ever caught cold when he was drunk; and if you are not drunk, sir, you ought to be, that's all. Where's the brandy?"

"I was not thinking of catching cold, sir; I was thinking——"

"Give me the brandy," interrupted the doctor angrily: "that's worth all the thought in the world. You've been drinking it, young man, as you came along; yes, you have, for I see it's lower.—Ah! that's good. I have not tasted such stuff as this for a month, for that old curmudgeon at the inn will give me no credit. By Heaven! what a happy week I've got before me! Now, give me the fresh bottle also."

"Not till we've done this job," returned Mr. Woodford Murphy, with the courage of despair. "You shall have that and the money too directly you have shown me what you promised. You may trust me implicitly—never fear."

"Trust you!" laughed the doctor ferociously (he was getting exceedingly drunk); "why, damme, if you didn't prove as good as your word I'd just put you in this hole alive, and trample the turf over you, Mr. Fosbrook." He uttered the last word with a mocking drawl. "You reminded me of your mother when you said that, exceedingly. She always took great credit to herself for paying her

just debts ; but you have not your mother's pluck, nor (to do him justice, although he never did it me) your father's. Indeed, sir, judging from the little I have seen of you, I should say you are but a sneak. However, we are not going to keep house together, so my not having taken a liking to you does not much matter.—Now, see, I have come to the last nail. It is a question of ten thousand a year to you whether I have told you the truth or not, and yet all you are going to give me, in case I have, is a paltry hundred and fifty pounds. I suppose a youth of your description is incapable of feeling the sentiment of shame.—I thought so. You're as pale as a sheet ; then I must blush for you.—There's the lid off at last ; now you can satisfy your own eyes."

The light, turned full upon the little coffin, showed Mr. Fosbrook kneeling beside it, and examining its contents with eager eyes. "Two bricks and a piece of wood !" exclaimed he triumphantly.

"Just so," chuckled the doctor. "Mr. Wilson kindly permitted them to be placed in

consecrated ground, although the rites of the church had not been paid to the deceased. It was represented to him that the bereaved mother wished them to be placed near the grave of their great-uncle, Tyson Harrison—that's the one you're standing upon—and it was altogether a very affecting business."

"Let us put it back again," observed Mr. Fosbrook with anxiety.


"What a practical youth it is, and how little given to the sentimental emotions!" observed the doctor with a sneer. "You remind me so strongly of your dear mother, Mr. Woodford Murphy, that I can hardly restrain myself from hitting you over the head with the spade. We must not, my young friend, re-inter these remains with unseemly haste. First, the fresh bottle of brandy (you must take home the empty one, for if they find it here they will be certain to say it's *me* that has made this mess); secondly, the notes, which I will count, if you please.—Yes; they are all right; and indeed, thanks to your hospitality, there seem even to be more than there ought to be; and, thirdly, I have a few

words to say to you—the wind has, you see, politely lulled a little—before we part company, as I most sincerely hope we are about to do, for ever. I don't wish you to go away, young man, under the mistaken impression that you have made a tool of Herbert Warton. The information you have received from me has only gone to confirm the suspicions already entertained by your intelligent mother: I have betrayed no one, and least of all myself.—I see you are smiling, sir, in a very disagreeable manner; you are puffed up with what you imagine to be a successful stroke of roguery. But listen a moment. If anything I have shown you here turns out to be harmful to me, it is not my memory that will suffer. I shall be dead and gone long before your Uncle Ernest cuts *his* cable, and it is only after his death that this secret will be of any use to you. Whatever folks may say of me, therefore, they will not call me a fool for having taken your money. Whereas—but let us first put back these precious relics, and make all things as smooth and green again as we can—whereas, Mr. Claude Woodford Murphy, when

our little adventure of to-night is being discussed, it will be remarked of your share in it that your mother sent her pig to a wrong market when she despatched you to Sandal-thwaite."

"How so, doctor?" inquired Woody contemptuously. "Have I not found out what she wanted to know?"

"Certainly; as a child finds out how his watch goes by taking out the inside, and rendering it useless to him for the future. Why, can't you see, poor little fool—you that kept your head so clear in order to overreach the doctor, and drank watered sherry while he was taking his brandy neat—don't you see, even *now*, that you have destroyed the value of this very evidence for which you have paid so much, by being so hasty? It would, indeed, have been a great point to have shown what we have just seen, untouched and untampered with, to half a dozen impartial spectators, but very little use to do so henceforth. You can't get a 'private view' of the inside of a grave, as your father gets of the picture exhibitions, without prejudice to its value; for what is



certain to be said by your enemies—by those who do not know the simplicity of your disposition, my young friend—is this: That Mr. Claude Woodford Murphy came down to Sandalthwaite under the name of 'Fosbrook,' and deposited in the coffin of little Miss Ripson, and in the place of her infant bones, two bricks and a piece of wood."


The doctor's speech, although thick and indistinct, was distinguished by much malicious vehemence, and the effect of its peroration was greatly enhanced by his shutting in the door of the lantern with his last word, and producing total darkness. Nothing was heard for a few moments save the roaring of the storm; then an agonised cry broke forth from the unfortunate Woody, to the effect that if he fell into the river the crime of murder would rest upon the doctor's soul. At this, the person appealed to gave vent to such a guffaw of uproarious mirth that it answered all the purpose of a guide-post, for the astute youth made at once for the point from which it came, and thereby discovered the stile. Here he waited for some minutes, breathing hard, but

uttering no word of complaint, though, like the parrot in the story, probably thinking all the more, while his late guest and companion marked his own way homeward by snatches of drunken laughter; then slowly and cautiously he made for the light still gleaming from the *Wrestler's Arms*. After which, Valentine also turned his steps towards home, with much unlooked-for food for thought added to that which he had brought out with him.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO CASES OF BROW-AGUE.

VALENTINE BLAKE was an early riser, and never needed to be called; but before he was well awake upon the morning which followed the events narrated in the last chapter there was a violent knocking at his chamber-door. Jacob the groom, a Sandalthwaite man, and the only male servant at the Hall except the gardener, presented himself at the bedside, with that half-pleased, half-terrified expression of countenance which persons of his class are wont to wear when they have any catastrophe to communicate. If there is something about the misfortunes of our friends not altogether unpleasing to us, the disasters of our betters are certainly still more gratifying; and the



tutor guessed at once from Jacob's face that something had gone wrong in the house, and that it had not happened to a fellow-servant.

"Is your mistress worse, or what is the matter?" asked he hastily.

"No, sir; it's not that; nor master neither, nor yet Mr. Bentinck."

"Good God! it's not Miss Evelyn?" ejaculated Valentine, leaping to his feet, and thrusting on some of his clothes.

"No, sir, nor it's not Miss Evelyn," continued the groom mysteriously. "You would never guess who it is, sir, seeing him out and about in all weathers, and here as much as anywhere, and known to us all so well that it seems almost as bad as being gone one's self. Poor Dr. Warton's dead, sir."

Certainly Valentine would never have guessed who it was. He had had the doctor in his mind well-nigh all night, for he had dreamed of him unceasingly; but even in his dreams he had never associated him with death. On the contrary, his last thoughts before going to sleep had been concerning the steps which it would become his duty to take

with respect to that very person ; and now he had been snatched from the web of human life altogether, and was to be no more questioned by man.

"Yes ; I know'd you'd feel it, sir, as much as anybody," resumed Jacob, mistaking the cause of the tutor's silence, "notwithstanding as you never know'd him in his prime. I have not told the squire, for I thought you'd better do it, and likewise missis and Miss Evelyn ; but Mr. Bentinck, I told *him*, and he swore at me for waking him up with news such as he says will keep ; but he shouldn't talk like that, I told him, for the poor doctor was the man as first brought him into the world ; and then he banged his boots at my head ; and so I came to *you*, sir."

"You did right, Jacob," said Valentine thoughtfully. "I will break the news myself. —But how did it happen ? and are you sure it's true ? for it must have been very sudden."

"Ah ! you may say sudden indeed, sir. That's the most terrible part of it. He was a-dining at the *Wrestler's Arms* with a gent of the name of Fobjoy, or summut, as called him

in for advice, it seems; and they drank and drank together prodigious. Some says it was a wager, and that the doctor won it, as it's most likely he did; and besides there was a deal of money found in his pockets; and we know how poor he was before, so that he could scarcely get trust for his whisky-toddy. Well, this Mr. Fobjoy had seen him home, it seems, and given him a bottle of brandy, meaning nothing but kindness, though it was his death-blow; but he didn't go to bed—not he. About daybreak, as near as it might be, this morning, his old landlady hears a terrible noise overhead, and knows at once as the poor doctor has fallen; and when she ran in, without waiting for so much as a petticoat, there he was upon the floor, all wet through, having been out in the storm, and chill and still as a stone; and when she saw the bottle lying with the little that had been left within it spilt about, she knew—because he had been always so careful of good liquor—that he was nothing less than dead. And so it was.”

During this narration the tutor had been dressing as expeditiously as possible; and now,

it being still early, and none of the family stirring, he resolved to take a walk to the village before breakfast. It was a lovely morning, and the rain of the previous night, glistening upon the green leaves and turf, made the face of penitent Nature very beautiful; but Valentine felt much sadder than when he had last trodden the same way, scarce six hours ago, through the blinding storm. He had known men, whose faces were at least as familiar to him as that of Herbert Warton, to die as suddenly—nay, he had seen them fall dead by scores about him on the battle-field, and yet their fate had not affected him as this man's had done. So it is with most of us. We hear or read of hundreds, nay, thousands of our fellow-creatures killed in action without the thrill of horror that a single death from a chance bullet close to our own doors will cause us. We read almost unmoved, under the head of "Missing Vessel" (it happens every week), that a whole ship's company have been blotted from the list of the living; and yet, when a boy is drowned bathing in the river that skirts our lawn we are sharply

grieved. Soldiers perish, and sailors drown ; but it is the violent or sudden death of the stay-at-home neighbours—the nearness and the unexpectedness together—which moves us most. If Valentine was thus touched, how much more were the simple folks of Sandalthwaite, within whose doors Death came but seldom—scarcely ever without decent notice—and generally preceded by “the three warnings.”

The disease which most affected people in those parts was that of extreme old age ; and the poor doctor was only sixty or so, or, in other words, in the prime of life. True, he had looked worn and broken for some time, but still there was nothing in that to mitigate the suddenness of such a catastrophe as this. It was also not unknown that he drank deeply ; but drinking was a weakness so common to his neighbours that it was felt very indecorous to attribute his fate to liquor. It was allowed that he had taken more than was good for him upon the fatal night ; but the general verdict of his Sandalthwaite friends was, “that ’ud ha’ done him no harm, bless ye, if there had na been summut wrong with

his heart." They alluded, of course, to a physical ailment.

All his faults of temper were forgotten, now that he was no more ; while his geniality, his love of anecdote, and his open-handedness (for whenever there *was* anything in his hand, poor fellow, he was ready enough to bestow it), were gratefully remembered. The old sexton alone (whom the tutor overtook upon the road) had anything to say with reference to the doctor's defects.

"He was allus obstinate, Mr. Blake," said he, "and disbelieving in respect to signs ; and now—not that I wishes to throw a stone at him, poor soul, just because he's in Heaven—it has come home to himself. Again and again he has called me an old gowk—and yet he has gone first, you see, for it ain't the young as lives the longest—about warnings and such like, and (as though a man didn't know his own trade) especially with regard to them grave-fallings, which he would always have it came from the water-springs, or the storms, or dog-scratchings, or what not ; and now, only last night, there came one for

himself, poor man. 'Tis in the north-east corner, just where old Tyson Harrison lies ; yet I wish that my words had not been proved so sadly, and that he was alive to laugh at me now : for he'd 'a done it, sir, he would, if this had happened to anybody else ; for he was that stubborn that he never gave in to nobody. I shan't put him nigh that ere place, however, lest folks should say it was spite ; and God Almighty knows I forgive him, just as though he had allowed he was wrong."

"I see you come from the *Wrestler's Arms*," said Valentine thoughtfully. "Has anything been seen of Mr. Fosbrook this morning?"


"Yes, sir, his *back*," returned the old man grimly. "He was off in a car, pack and package, directly he heard of what had happened. He said the news had shaken him so that in his weak state of health he didn't know what effect it might have upon him. He certainly did look pale enough. I wonder how the doctor came to get all that money out of him, for, if not from him, where could it ha' come from? However, I'm right glad of it,

for it'll pay his debts and bury him very comfortable."

Thus, with what charity lay in him, did each one among the groups collected round the dead man's door that morning converse concerning him that was departed. Herbert Warton's death had left a void in that little world, in which, although he despised it, he had upon the whole borne himself as a good neighbour and a willing helpmate. Valentine, who knew worse of him than any suspected, went in to pay his tribute of a pitiful glance and silent prayer to the giant frame, already so stiff and gaunt, that should never more be seen towering above his fellows at church or revel; and, saddened with the sight, returned to tell the squire and his household. Reticence, however, for so long a time had been found by Jacob to be impossible, and in the meanwhile he had told everybody. Curiously enough, with the exception of tender-hearted Evelyn, the Black Squire seemed to be the most affected. Perhaps the recollection of many a drinking-bout together—for had they not been boon-companions for years?—really

touched him ; or perhaps the fact of their being contemporaries (within a few months) made him unusually mindful of the Shadow that must needs be awaiting himself at no great distance off upon Life's road : but certainly Mr. Woodford was moved by Herbert Warton's death. Evelyn, too, as we have said, shed honest tears, albeit she had never liked the doctor ; but Mrs. Woodford, who had been on far more intimate terms with him, seemed to take the matter not at all to heart—to be sure, she had grown so dull and phlegmatic of late that scarcely anything awaked her interest—yet the present happened to be one of her “good days,” and the sorrowful news did not seem to darken it in the least. Mrs. Ripson, too, showed a philosophy so cheerful when speaking of the common loss, that it almost robbed her of Valentine's good opinion : he had always looked upon the housekeeper as a very kindly creature, although somewhat weak ; and even now, when he could not regard her without some vague suspicions, he strove to think the best of her until he should know the worst. Nevertheless, although Mrs.

Woodford's state of health forbade her attendance at the doctor's funeral, it was arranged that not only Evelyn but Mrs. Ripson should pay his memory that respect, in common with the male portion of the family. A burial at Sandalthwaite, although a primitive ceremony, was a very genuine and impressive one. Women as well as men followed the body to its last resting-place ; and although there were no nodding plumes or sable steeds, there were thrice the number of sorrowful faces that are seen in any London cemetery. In the hurrying streets we scarcely cast a glance at the procession that is taking our unknown brother to his unknown grave ; but at Sandalthwaite every man, woman, and child whose occupation permitted of it were wont to see the last of the neighbour that they knew so well, and by whose side they were themselves fated one day to lie. In the case of such an old inhabitant, and one so well known as Herbert Warton, it was certain that all, save perhaps a shepherd or two, whose distant charge compelled his absence, would be at the funeral. Mr. Wilson himself was to read the service, for although



the dead man had been so long his helpmate (and as it seemed now his friend), he was not one to give way to his feelings, and delegate such a duty to another.

During the intervening week there was little else discussed in the quiet village save reminiscences of the Departed, and guesses at his probable successor ; and even at Dewbank Hall topics of conversation were not so plentiful as altogether to exclude such talk. The affair having assumed this importance, it may be imagined that Mr. Bentinck Woodford created quite a sensation in the domestic circle upon the morning fixed for the ceremony by announcing his intention of not taking part in it, and appearing at breakfast in coloured garments. He said that he had got brow-ague—a malady previously unknown in the district—and that a hat with a heavy silk band about it would be utterly insupportable to him. The excuse was in the highest degree unlikely to be founded on fact ; but as it seemed ridiculous to compel a young gentleman to go to a funeral which his own sense of duty did not call upon him to attend, the Black Squire—

blacker than ever that morning—contented himself with calling his son a liar, and then let the matter drop. It was not a question in which Valentine was concerned as his tutor, and he happened to have business of his own at the moment which fully occupied him. Two letters had arrived for him—a most unusual circumstance—and in one of those at least, a short and soldier-like epistle, with the Milan postmark on it, there was much material for reflection. Evelyn was clairvoyant to its contents, as, sitting behind the urn, she watched his colour heighten as he read the words which were to him as a very trumpet-call; and she dropped her eyes and coloured in her turn as the tutor turned his glance (she knew it was coming) upon her. How beautiful she looked in those mourning garments, not to be put off (if those earnest eyes could have looked into the future) for many and many a day! The other letter was an official one, and bore the stamp of the War Office. Mr. Woodford noticed the huge envelope, and observed: “They have not appointed you to the command of the Horse Marines, I trust?”

This was his gracious way of expressing a genuine uneasiness which he had felt of late lest Valentine's services should be lost to him.

"No, sir ; I have no appointment from her Majesty's government," returned the tutor with a grave smile.

"He is going to Italy !" murmured Evelyn to herself, "and I shall never, never see him more."

The bell that began to toll from the old church tower seemed to strike her heart with every clang. She would have given much to have been able to feign brow-ague, like her cousin, and to retire to her own room, but it was too late now. In less than half an hour they were all on their way to church ; her uncle walking first, somewhat pompously, as though he were the chief-mourner, and the coffin were behind him ; then Valentine and Evelyn, interchanging not a syllable, each wrapped in serious thought, but which perhaps had little to do with the matter in hand ; next Mrs. Ripson, thoughtful too, with her white pocket-handkerchief close to her eyes, but perfectly dry ; and after her most of the

servants, including Jacob, conscious of their impressive appearance, and solemnly enjoying themselves. They little knew what a fund of such ceremonials Fate, benevolently secretive, had in store for them, and close at hand, otherwise, they might not have made so much of the present occasion. If people died, and were *not* buried—if “they sparkled, were exhaled, and went to heaven” without the intermediate offices of the undertaker—many honest folks would be deprived of a legitimate pleasure. The procession from the Hall, joined by other sombre bands which fell in respectfully behind them, trooped into church for the burial-service. All the parish were there assembled who did not accompany the corpse itself. Presently, It was borne in. Many honest tears were shed at the sight of it. Valentine, who shed none, although, as has been shown, he was sorry, glanced round the church, and remarked with surprise that Mrs. Wilson was not accompanied by her daughter. The service ended, and the congregation flowing in inky waves to the churchyard, he found himself next to the minister's wife.

"Miss Lucy is not here," said he: "I trust she is not ill?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Blake: I am sorry to say the poor child is very unwell: she has the Brow-ague."

Valentine bowed his head in token of sympathy, but he did not speak; his mind on a sudden became the prey of a dreadful apprehension. Disentangling himself with difficulty from the crowd that was edging towards the grave-mouth, he turned his steps rapidly homeward; not so fast, however, but that he was overtaken by a little boy, with but a rag of crape round his arm in token of respect for the departed, but otherwise in shining mourning robes, his jacket and trousers at once proclaiming him as a whilom worker in the now closed wad-mine. He held a letter in his hands the envelope of which might have been considered for the same reason mourning note-paper, and very deep-edged. "I was to give this to you, sir, from Mr. Adams," panted the breathless boy. "He said it was to be put in your hands Immediate; but when I got to the Hall you was gone to

church, and I didn't like to give it to you in service-time."

Valentine took the missive, and tore it open. "Directly you get this, sir, make haste to the Seven Sisters. Something very bad is meant, I doubt, to somebody, by you know who. 'Be there by noon, at latest. Perhaps I ought to interfere myself, but I dare not—I dare not.

"G. A."

"Was Mr. Bentinck Woodford at the Hall when you got there?" inquired Valentine anxiously.

"No," said the boy; "I met him as I came over the fells. He was a-going, as it seemed, towards Wallowdale, and pretty fast."


Now the Seven Sisters were a group of fir-trees so called in that very valley. Valentine looked at his watch; gave his hat, encumbered with its trappings of woe, into the boy's hand, with instructions to leave it at the Hall; and then, to the astonishment of his juvenile spectator, started off bare-headed, and at full speed, across the field, leaping the stone walls that lay in his way, and wading through the river itself, and breasting the opposite fell as

no runner in Sandalthwaite could have breasted it save one—the very man he was now pursuing, with a clear couple of miles' start of him, and garments better suited for a mountain run than funeral broadcloth and Sunday boots. But after such a warning Valentine Blake would not have hesitated, even had circumstances compelled him to run in irons. He knew there was some devilry afloat—that evil was menacing the Innocent; and if he had known the full extent of the crime and the danger, muscle, and lungs, and sinew could not have been taxed more heavily than they were.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE "SEVEN SISTERS."

WHEN Valentine Blake, after seven miles of severe mountain-work, during which he had never ceased to run, came in sight of peaceful Wallowdale he gave himself a moment's pause. The secluded valley was a *cul-de-sac*, furnished with only one exit, which, however, was available for wheeled conveyances. The Seven Gigantic Sisters, with their mighty boles and far-spreading layers of shade, would have been striking objects anywhere, but in that comparatively treeless district they attracted many visitors ; and even now there was a pair-horse vehicle standing opposite, in what might be called the gate of the valley, which was very probably in waiting for its sight-seeing tenants,



who had got out in order to examine the Umbrageous Wonder, which stood in the centre, upon a steep knoll, or "howe." But there were two circumstances which militated against this supposition, although they might have failed to do so to a mind not quickened by suspicion. In the first place, the vehicle was not the open car peculiar to the district, and which would certainly have been used by tourists upon so fine a day; in the second place, there was a portmanteau fastened behind it, which, considering that Wallowdale was the final object of all Visitors, and that the Seven Sisters was not an inn where you could sleep, was a very singular and unaccountable fact indeed. No sooner did Valentine's quick eye light upon this article, than he drew back from his exposed position on the brow of the hill, and proceeded to make the circuit of the valley, so as to get between the carriage and its only possible means of exit; otherwise, had his presence been distasteful to whomsoever might be on the howe in question, they had only to mount and drive away, in order to escape him. Upon reaching the vehicle he

found the postboy, who was sitting on the turf beside it smoking a short pipe, was quite unknown to him, a circumstance which struck him as peculiar, for he was by this time well acquainted by sight with all the drivers usually employed by inn-keepers in that neighbourhood; neither had he ever before seen the postchaise (a species of conveyance uncommon enough even in those out-of-the-way parts). But the portmanteau, on the other hand, he recognised at once, for it was placed (for a wonder) with the right side uppermost, and displayed the initials (B. W.) of his hopeful pupil.

"You have come a long way, my man," observed the tutor, pointing to the horses, that, splashed and travel-stained, were ruminating in their nosebags with drooping ears.

"Ay, you may say that," rejoined the man, staring at Valentine's bare head; "though I didn't come so fast as to lose my hat. And it's a main long way to go back again, too, to the railway station."

"Perhaps I shall save you that journey," was Valentine's inward thought, but the only

remark he made was, "That's true, my man," as, with a good-natured nod, he took his way to the howe. He judged it better to find out for himself what mischief was brewing, rather than to awaken suspicion in the postboy, who, it was evident, was quite innocent of any wrong-doing that might be intended. As he climbed the steep upon which stood the Sable Seven, he saw no sign of any present occupant of the place, although fragments of glass and bits of broken plates were plentiful, telling of recent picnic-parties held beneath the grateful shade. Even when he reached the top of the little hill, and stood in the dusky centre of the ring of trees, he at first saw nothing, but he heard a short sharp scream, and a voice, which apprehension and anxiety had not so disguised but that he recognised it at once, cry : "Mr. Blake !"


In deep black, which she had put on at her mother's request that morning, in respect for the sad ceremony which was taking place at Sandalthwaite, sat Lucy Wilson, close beside him, but half-hidden by one of the funereal trees. She was in the act of endeavouring to

draw down a thick veil over her pale and frightened features, as though her exclamation had not already betrayed her; a characteristic action enough, the simplicity of which would, under less serious circumstances, have provoked a smile: as it was, however, it touched Valentine to the quick. What a childlike, guileless girl was this, and what a heartless scoundrel must that man be who could plot against such innocence and beauty!

Rising hastily, she threw towards him an embarrassed glance; then looked to left and right, as if in hopes of the coming of some other person, to relieve her from the task of explaining matters.

"It was not *I* whom you expected to see here, Miss Wilson," said the tutor gravely; "and, on the other hand, you are the very last person, whom, an hour ago, I should have looked to find at the Seven Sisters. Your mother, whom I have just met at church, told me you were suffering from brow-ague, and too ill to stir abroad."

"Don't answer him, Lucy.—What is that to you, sir?" exclaimed the rough and angry



voice of Bentinck Woodford, as that young gentleman suddenly presented himself before them. "Why do you play the spy on folks in this way, and pry into matters which concern you not? You had better go home, Mr. Blake, the way you came—if you wish to keep a whole skin."

"No, sir; I shall go home by the road," replied the tutor sternly; "and with this lady in my company."

"You will, will you?" cried the young man bitterly, and using a frightful imprecation. "We shall soon see that. We are no longer pupil and tutor, remember. I have done with all that, and am a married man.—Am I not, Lucy?"

One swift glance at the girl's bewildered face, and before she could muster words to speak Valentine had read her answer.

"Well did your father call you 'liar,' Bentinck Woodford," exclaimed he. "And worse than that, you would teach others to lie."

"Well, if I'm not married, I am going to be to-day," returned Bentinck sullenly.

"Where?" asked Valentine, fixing his eyes steadily upon the blushing girl. "Where has this man promised to marry you, Lucy? I will lay my life that he is deceiving you."

"No, sir; no," answered Lucy eagerly. "Bentinck would never deceive me. We are to be married at——"

"Hold your tongue, Lucy!" broke in the bridegroom-expectant with angry vehemence. "If Mr. Blake has anything to say, let him speak to *me*—like a man."

"Like a man!" repeated Valentine contemptuously. "There is nothing manly in your nature, Bentinck Woodford, besides your thews and sinews, you bully and false coward. And you would leave your father and your mother, Lucy, to put your trust in one like this. Look now, and if you are not blinded by foolish passion, tell me if he shows like an honest man."

Mad with rage, his black eyes flashing flame, the young desperado dashed at his tutor like a wild beast; but Valentine, stepping on one side to avoid his rush, gripped him with iron knuckles inside his neckcloth, and so held him,

as the blue-coated guardian of the law holds some burly ruffian, full of fight, but not unapprehensive of immediate suffocation.

"Don't hurt him—don't hurt him, Mr. Blake," cried Lucy, terrified at the terrible look in the tutor's face. "I will go home with you—I will indeed—if you will let Bentinck go."

"Do you hear her?" asked Valentine sternly. "If I let you go, you worthless dog, will you cease to molest this unhappy child? But there—what is the use of a promise from a scoundrel? Be off with you ; or if I take you by the throat again I'll squeeze it somewhat harder."

Bentinck, half throttled by the tutor's gripe, and with his fierce face a shade blacker than usual, staggered back for a few paces, and thrust his hand into his coat-pocket.

Valentine clenched his fist, fully expecting to see him draw out a clasp-knife ; but he only produced a dog-whistle, and blew upon it shrilly with what breath his late antagonist had left to him.

"Whatever happens now, you fool," cried

the young ruffian savagely, "you have brought upon yourself with your damned meddling. See, yonder comes one who will squeeze *your* throat for you, and that to some purpose. You shall not tell tales of us after we're gone."

Valentine cast a glance in the direction indicated by his pupil, and beheld Miles Ripson hurrying across the little valley.

"Flee, Mr. Blake, flee ; they will hurt you !" exclaimed Lucy, clasping her hands.

"No, no ; we shan't hurt him particularly," returned Bentinck with a sneer ; "that is, unless he's obstinate.—Here, Miles ; I want you just to help gag and bind this gentleman, and leave him here for the next picnic-party to untie him. That will be doing no great harm."

Valentine was turning over in his mind whether it would not be better to run over to the carriage, and enlist the postboy on his side, by threatening him with the terrors of the law, rather than enter upon so unequal a combat as now awaited him ; but his nature revolted from turning his back upon any foe, however superior in strength ; and while he

debated within himself Miles had gained the top of the hill, and the alternative was no longer presented. There was an indecision in the miner's features (although their expression was far from friendly) which gave the tutor an assurance that he was not so desperately bent upon the matter in hand as his young confederate, and some hope that he would prove less deaf to reason, or, at all events, less reckless of consequences.

"I call you to witness, Miles Ripson," said he, stepping close to Lucy, so as to stand between her and them, "that I am here to prevent the abduction of this young lady by that graceless lad ; and that she has asked me to take her home to her father and mother.—Is it not so, Miss Wilson ?"

"O yes, Mr. Blake, I see I was wrong, and I *am* so frightened.—I had much rather go back to Sandalthwaite, I had indeed, Bentinck. Let us wait—I am sure Mr. Woodford will give way at last if you will only have patience—and let us be married at the parish church instead of Gretna."

"At Gretna !" ejaculated Valentine. "Why,

there are no marriages at Gretna now, my poor girl. This scoundrel only seeks your ruin."

"I always told you from the first, Master Ben, that this was a bad business," observed Ripson sullenly. "For my part, I see no good as can come of it, but only a deal of risk."

"Yes, and not only to himself," urged Valentine, "but to all concerned in such a disgraceful outrage."

"Come, we've had enough of this," exclaimed Bentinck menacingly. "If you don't help me here, Miles, by Heaven, I'll tell what I know about you and the wad!"

"Never mind him, Ripson," answered the tutor; "I will bear you harmless concerning that matter, about which I have long ago known enough to do you an ill turn, had I been so inclined."

"Then George Adams must have been telling you his lies," returned Ripson sharply, with a malevolent glance at Valentine. "You're a friend of *his*, are you, mister?"

"Yes, that he is, Miles," cried Bentinck; "they're as thick as thieves, those too. Now

look you : Lucy here wants to make a runaway match of it with me—and small blame to her, living the dull life she leads—and I've sworn to marry her and makè a lady of her, and here's this damned fellow putting in his oar, and spoiling all ; just as George Adams would do in your case, if he dared. I daresay we owe it to him, eavesdropping and spying about, that this gentleman is here at all."

"Is that true?" asked Miles, knitting the black brows which Time had only just begun to grizzle, and speaking in tones hoarser even than usual.

"Yes, it is true," answered Valentine haughtily. "He is not quite such a scoundrel as to suffer an innocent girl to be deceived by this selfish young ruffian, from any fear of what you or any other man can do him."

"Very good," said Ripson between his teeth. "I'm your man then, Master Ben ;" and exchanging a rapid glance with one another, both Miles and Bentinck rushed at Valentine at the same instant. Flight, if such an idea had entered the tutor's mind (which it had not), was now impossible, and he did but shift his

position, so as to get his back to one of the giant trees. The wad-miner, confident in himself, and without experience of Valentine's strength and agility, ran in upon him, with the intention of grappling anywhere, certain that before he could be thrown, no matter what the disadvantage of his hold, his ally would have come to his aid; but the tutor, whose physical accomplishments included the Art of Self-defence, treated him with two such tremendous "facers," that Miles drew back, shaking his gory face like a bull whom a stone has taken between the horns, and astonished greatly, although by no means put *hors de combat*. But Bentinck, much more wary, kept at a little distance, seeking to entice the enemy from his place of vantage; and well for him that he did so, for Valentine, perceiving that he could not long maintain so unequal a fight, had determined within himself to be restrained by no false clemency, but to strike, and strike hard, where the danger to the poor girl alone lay, namely, in his pupil. If he could once cripple that young scoundrel, it was evident—since Miles was by no means eager to carry

out the scheme of his young master—that the plot would miscarry. Nor did he cease to adjure Lucy by the love and duty she owed to her parents, and as she valued her own good fame, to seize the opportunity of his keeping these men in check to save herself by flight. But the unhappy girl, although by no means weak in body, notwithstanding that she had come over the hills from Sandalithwaite, as Valentine and Bentinck had done (although all three by different routes), was so prostrated by mental fears that she was quite incapable of doing his bidding, and could only kneel down on the mossy ground, sobbing aloud, and hiding her eyes with her hands, to shut out the sight of the already not bloodless strife. This was indeed growing very serious. Miles, smarting with the blows he had received, was now become at least as reckless as his young confederate, and as eager for revenge; while every moment of delay thus interposed between Bentinck and his desperate purpose exasperated the self-willed lad more and more.

Valentine knew that it would go hard with him if once they got him down, but the fate

which would in that case await the terrified girl, already repenting of her imprudence, affected him still more: he was quite prepared to part with life itself, if it were necessary, for her sake, and to sell it very dearly. Yet even with these considerations pressing upon his mind, and in the tumult and heat of combat, he could not help observing the remarkable similitude in the countenances of his two foes, lit up as they were with the same passion, and set upon the same vengeful intent. The resemblance was so striking, that were it not for the difference of years Miles Ripson and Valentine's pupil might very well have been twin-brothers. So long as the struggle was undecided the advantage, as the tutor was well aware, remained with himself, for he was gaining time; and time, if he could only gain enough of it, was certain to bring him aid. Long before this, the absence of Bentinck and Lucy from Sandalthwaite must have been discovered, and the coincidence of their pretended indisposition have put suspicion on the right track; while the evidence of the boy-messenger was a link that would lead the pursuit to Wallowdale

itself. Although his two assailants were not of course cognizant of the last fact, they were quite conscious of the necessity for immediate action ; and after a whispered consultation, in which Bentinck seemed to take the part of generalissimo, and his senior that of lieutenant, the combined forces moved once more to the attack. Instead of approaching him in front, as before, they executed a flank movement, each advancing upon him from opposite sides, and at exactly the same distance, so that, in case of his assaulting one, he must needs turn his back upon the other. This stratagem, as Valentine foresaw, would be fatal to him ; but mindful of which enemy it was of the most importance to secure, and once more calling loudly to Lucy to flee while she had yet an opportunity to do so, he made a feint of striking at Ripson, and then threw himself with all his force upon Bentinck, and bore him heavily to the ground, without much minding if he should chance to hurt him. But the turf was soft, and the young giant's limbs were of iron ; and the next moment a heavy weight was hurled upon his own frame, and he felt the fingers of

the wad-miner tightening around his throat with a gradual malignity worse than any mere gripe of passion, and which Valentine, sick at heart (for who does not love his life?), felt at once meant nothing less than Murder.

"Squeeze him tight, Miles," gasped Bentinck from beneath, "as he threatened to squeeze me a while ago."

"I'm a-doin' on it," responded the other grimly: "he won't tell no tales of either you or me a——"

Here the calmness and deliberation of Mr. Ripson's speech was marred by a most violent exclamation.

"Thousand devils!" cried he, "here's George Adams!"

"Yes; and just in time to prevent you making the thousand-and-oneth, you murdering scoundrel!" cried a deep determined voice. "Get off, get off, I say.—Now lie there quiet, or you are a dead man.—Mr. Bentinck, if you do not let go of Mr. Blake's neckcloth, by the sun in Heaven, I'll set my hobnailed shoe upon your mouth! If you have helped to murder him, you shall swing for it, along with

this villain here, though you were three times my master's son.—Mr. Valentine, for God's sake, speak to me, and let me know you are alive."

The tutor uttered a faint groan.

"Miss Lucy, run for water," continued George, "or there will be blood upon your head too. There is a spring to the right yonder.—Stop; first undo his cravat.—I will answer for these ruffians; if either of them so much as stirs, so help me Heaven, I will brain him with this hatchet!"

Armed with this weapon, George Adams was indeed complete master of the situation, and both his foes were at his mercy. Perhaps, when the first disappointment of baffled rage had passed by, they were scarcely less relieved than the manager himself to see Valentine open his eyes and breathe heavily once or twice, as Lucy Wilson, still weeping bitterly, but roused to usefulness by the extreme necessity of the case, applied the water to his forehead.

"I was almost gone, George," whispered he presently; "I owe you my life. And this unhappy lad here, he owes you far more."

"I never meant to do you any harm," returned Bentinck sullenly.

"Nor I," said Ripson with selfish eagerness. "It was no business of mine at all. Did you not hear the squire's son say 'Squeeze him tight?' and I only did what I was bid."

"You were always a mean skunk, Miles," observed George contemptuously; "but the longer you live, it seems to me, the baser you get."

"Don't *you* talk so glib about folks being base and mean," retorted the wad-miner, "for if the truth were told——"

"We want no tale-bearing here," interrupted Valentine with sudden energy. "Get to your feet, and be off, sir; and you, Bentinck, go home at once. I shall say nothing of the violence that has been used to me, not for your own sakes—for you both richly deserve punishment—but for the sake of this unhappy girl: there will be scandal enough about her as it is. If your selfish heart, boy, is capable of feeling for others, it should be wrung with the thought of the wretchedness you have entailed upon your victim, and of the ruin which you so

basely designed for her. The very sight of you—now that she has beheld you in your true colours—has, I am glad to see, become loathsome to her; she will never more take the hand of a would-be murderer within her own.—Is it not so, Lucy?”

“O yes, yes. Let them go, let them go away,” cried the shuddering girl. “You have been my friend in spite of myself, Mr. Blake, and God bless you for it. But I can never return to my father’s house, or meet his look again.”

“Yes, you will,” answered Valentine cheerfully, as the two scoundrels slunk sullenly away. “Your return will be the best reparation you can offer for the wrong you have done them. Come; you are not in a state to walk so far—and besides, we should probably meet half the parish coming over the hills to look after you; so we will drive home together—in the carriage that was intended for a much more perilous journey. Thank George here—thank him, my poor girl, for having prevented that, for you have never before had such cause to thank any mortal man.”

"I *do* thank him," cried she, taking both the manager's hands in hers; "and I thank *you*, sir, too with my whole heart; and above all, I thank God, who has been so much more merciful to me than I deserved.—O Evelyn, Evelyn," cried the wretched girl in an agony of penitent sorrow, "how foolish and wicked have I been, to despise your warnings, and deceive you so!"

Judging rightly that the lesson administered to this young lady had been sufficiently severe, and that she was really laying it to heart, Valentine ceased to reproach her further; and, in order to allow her to recover herself before descending to the carriage, inquired of the manager how matters had been brought about to the present issue.

"Well, sir," said George frankly, "I don't know that I can take much credit to myself for being here. It was mere chance that brought me just in the nick of time."

"It was not chance, however, that caused you to send me the messenger that brought me hither," returned Valentine good-naturedly.

"No, sir, it was not; and yet if I had done

what was right I ought to have been here before you. The fact is—you know in what fear I stand because of that scoundrel Miles. Well, I knew this piece of devilry was coming off; but I did not know it was so bad as it really was. I heard him and the young master talking about running away with Miss Lucy—what they call a runaway match, I thought it was—for they made no count of me. They thought I was theirs, bound hand and foot, because of what the villain knew against me. I must say for Miles that he was always against it being done; told Master Bentinck as his father would never forgive him, and so on; but the young scapegrace would have his way. And though I knew it was going to be a week ago—directly the day was fixed for the doctor's funeral—yet I never said a word until this morning; I durst not do it. Then my conscience pricked me, and I sent over little William with the letter. I thought he would have reached you earlier, before you went to church, and I knew Master Bentinck would not start till after that; and, above all, I had no idea that Miles would have been here. He

was up in his hut as usual an hour ago, where he stays all day and night now, indeed, although there's no wad stole yet. But presently he slipped away, although I was looking out sharp from my own house; and I did not mean to interfere, if you had only Master Bentinck to deal with; but directly I found Miles might be here, I came up also, thanks be to Heaven! and not a minute too soon. Well, I have done my duty this time, if somewhat tardily, let them say what they like about my past.—It's all over now, sir. Miles will peach upon me for this; I am quite certain of it. I'm a ruined man; and it is only you who know for whose sake I did the deed for which I am now to suffer. It seems hard, though, being so long ago. Don't tell poor Mary, sir. She has enough to bear with that villain for her husband, even though it be only in name. When I have worked out my time—in jail—if I live over it—I shall go across the seas. I shall never see the bonny north again, where once—I beg your pardon, sir; you must take me for a fool as well as a coward.”

“No, George; I take you for an honest

man, and such can be neither one nor the other. No man ever need fear the consequences of having done his duty ; sooner or later, all comes right with him through that. I have had a letter this very morning about you, and here it is. You have nothing to apprehend from Miles Ripson now ; it has been decided that you are not to be proceeded against. There, read for yourself.—Nay, do not fall upon your knees to *me*, man, nor thank me, George, who have just been indebted to you for my life. The time is slipping away, and there are sore hearts to be comforted. Let us help this young lady down to the carriage.—Come, Lucy ; don't let the postboy see you crying. There is no need to weep now ; for, depend upon it, that will be the happiest moment of your good parents' lives when they catch sight of your pretty face coming home to them again."

CHAPTER XV.

MORE TROUBLE.

NEVER had there been such a glut of excitement in one day at Sandalthwaite as that which included Dr. Warton's funeral and Miss Lucy Wilson's attempted elopement. The first incident, however, was utterly dwarfed by the second, and almost discarded from men's minds; just as our gingham umbrella (formerly valuable, as being our only one) is put aside and little thought of when we are unexpectedly presented with a silk one. The village was not so small but that the population was sufficient to support several versions of the facts we have ourselves very truthfully narrated in the last chapter.

It was by many asserted that Valentine

Blake had run off with the young lady in question, married her, and brought her back again the same afternoon; an act of audacity such as could have been only carried out by a person who had spent most of his life in foreign parts. The postboy who drove them home from Wallowdale had probably never met with such lavish hospitality in his life (although the district is proverbial for it) as he experienced from all comers at the *Wrestler's Arms*. Every man was eager to treat him, in order to receive in return particular and exclusive information as to what had actually happened; and as he had really but little to tell, beyond that Mr. Bentinck Woodford had ordered the vehicle (with directions to call for his portmanteau at a certain beer-shop on the road), and that the tutor had occupied it, it is not to be wondered at that the poor fellow, feeling obliged to honour the draughts presented for his acceptance by agreeable details, got deeply in debt to his imagination. Unlike the writers of fiction, who first use up their original materials in fanciful and airy plots, and afterwards resort to Facts for the framework of their stories, the

postboy began with bald and naked truth, which, as he mixed his liquors, blended more and more with the ideal, until at last there was absolutely nothing "to go upon" in his whole story except the postchaise. *That* was trustworthy; that could bear cross-examination; and it bore a good deal of it, as it stood in the inn-yard, surrounded by that large portion of the inhabitants of Sandalthwaite who preferred vague excitement gratis to particular information at threepence a glass. If it was not the rose—which the musty, evil-smelling old vehicle had certainly no pretensions to be—it had been near the rose: it had contained the charming runaway and her lover, or *lovers* (for there were some who, thanks to the postboy, had drunk even of *that* wine of astonishment); and it was a satisfaction to the public to sit in turn where she had sat, and to make a thoroughfare of the vehicle by throwing both its doors open, and climbing in and out until they broke the springs. George Adams was easily recognised by the description given by the postboy (when in his early stage); but what part to assign to him in the drama played out at the Seven

Sisters was felt to be very difficult. Miles Ripson's name never transpired at all—the improvisatore had only seen “a black man” in the distance depart in company with Mr. Bentinck. Perhaps the devil had indeed flown away with the young squire. As had been agreed upon, no mention of that so nearly fatal conflict under the Seven Trees was made either by Lucy or Valentine.

There was enough of misdoing already laid to the charge of the precocious Bentinck, and the young gentleman himself apparently deemed that the consequences would be sufficiently serious, for he did not return to face them. This was felt, for the present at all events, to be a relief to all parties. The just indignation of the good parson could not have been restrained had that would-be destroyer of his domestic peace ventured to return, and show his black face among his flock; he would without doubt have spoken to him from the pulpit, and that would have been far from pleasant to the other occupants of the squire's pew. Mr. Woodford himself was not displeased that no opportunity was afforded him of laying that

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horsewhip about the shoulders of his prodigal son, without which substitute for the fatted calf he now never took his walks abroad; it was just possible that the young reprobate might offer some resistance—nay, was he not even unnatural enough to make reprisals?

Evelyn, wretched as she felt whenever she thought of her cousin, and the disgrace he had entailed upon all belonging to her, gathered some comfort from his absence: perhaps he was ashamed of himself—perhaps he was penitent. She looked in the postbag every morning for an abject confession of the enormity of his crime, and the avowal of his solemn resolve to mend his ways for the future. In the meantime, it was something that Lucy had received such a lesson of the dangers of undutifulness as she was never likely to forget. It was in Evelyn's company that the contrite girl had returned to her father's roof; it was Evelyn's voice that pleaded with him for her pardon, when already from Evelyn's arms she had passed into those of her mother, forgiven, welcomed, and dearer than before, because so nearly lost. Upon

Mrs. Woodford the tidings of Bentinck's misdoings seemed to have little other effect than to increase her physical ailments; she was growing more like a vegetable than ever, and bad news only made her withdraw into herself more and more, like a sensitive plant at the approach of night.

The only apologist for the young scapegrace that could be found at the Hall, or even in the parish, was the housekeeper. She had always shut her eyes to the faults of her foster-son, and this last escapade of his, serious as it was, she persisted in viewing as a mere peccadillo. Her reading, although by no means various, had been extensive, and from it she gathered that elopements were the only form of matrimony for young people of spirit. Perhaps her conscience secretly reproached her with having herself indoctrinated the lad with this idea, or, at all events, encouraged it in him; but it is right to add that Mrs. Ripson fully believed that his intention had been lawfully to marry the Beloved Object; and would not have credited, had she been told, that the world was so emptied of its

romance as to have dispensed with the services of the blacksmith of Gretna Green.

So the days wore on without any news of Bentinck, and Valentine—the squarest man in the world for the round hole of a Sinecure post—felt himself more and more without excuse for delaying, at Sandalithwaite, notwithstanding that the squire vehemently pressed his stay, and that the unconfessed attraction which held him to the place by the very heart-strings grew stronger and stronger daily. At last he made up his mind to depart, and fixed upon the very day: he had already written to his friend Giuseppe in Italy to say that he was about to be his comrade once again. Everybody at the Hall was sorry that Valentine was going, not even excepting Mrs. Woodford, and most of them expressed their sorrow in their own way. The squire, for instance, had averred that his departure, being singularly inconvenient and distasteful to him, was only what he, Ernest Woodford, had expected all along, and quite consistent with the general dispensation of affairs, which had always been in opposition to his private

wishes; and "Where the Deuce," asked he, "now that the doctor was dead, and the tutor going, was he to find anybody fit to speak to?"

Only Evelyn said nothing, although it cannot be added she made no sign of regret. Her paleness and silence spoke for her to those who understood such language (which her uncle fortunately did not), but in Valentine's presence she did her best to be cheerful.

"Lord bless you, Miss Evy, why don't you let him see you love him?" urged Mrs. Ripson bluntly; "that will be some comfort to him, at all events, when he goes to battle, if he must go." And though Evelyn reproved her adviser with greater sharpness than she ever used before to any human creature, Mrs. Ripson only answered: "Very well, miss: I won't open my lips again, I promise you; but I know more about these matters than you do, for I've read a deal more; and if Mr. Blake don't speak for himself before the day's out, then him or me is a fool."

Valentine was to take his departure the next day. Evelyn and he were standing to-

gether upon the lawn in the late autumn evening, while the squire, having received his usual morphean draught of pianoforte, was asleep in the drawing-room.

"We shall miss you very much, Mr. Blake," said Evelyn in quiet tones. "I hope you will often let my uncle know how you fare in—in Italy."

"Yes, Miss Evelyn. And you too, perhaps, will write me news of home when you have time. Bentinck will doubtless come back soon. I have strongly advised Mr. Woodford to send him to college, where he will meet with suitable companions, of which he stands so much in need."

"I will do so, be sure. How strange will seem the tidings of our village-life to you amid the pomp and circumstance of war!"

"Everything will have an interest to me that comes from Sandalthwaite, Miss Evelyn. I shall be glad to hear in particular about George Adams: I pity that poor fellow as well as like him much: his lot in life appears to have been sadly crossed."

Thus

They spoke of other things ; they coursed about
The subject most at heart, more near and near,
Like doves about a dovecot, wheeling round
The central wish, until they settled there.

“There is no fear,” said Valentine gravely,
“of my forgetting any here, and least of all
yourself. But perhaps you would not object
to give me something—all Irishmen are
beggars, your uncle says, and so you must
excuse me—something I have fixed my fancy
on, as a parting present?”

“Certainly, Mr. Blake ; I will give you what
you please, and welcome.”

“It is not anything very valuable, Miss
Evelyn, that I mean to ask you for ; but when
I first came here, your uncle took me over all
the house, and there was a little picture, hang-
ing in your room, I think, which struck me
much. It is a water-colour drawing of a spot
I recognized at once—the Sugar-loaf Mountain
above Rio Janeiro—and I should like to
possess it, linking as it does my life here with
that I spent in other lands. Do I ask too
much of you ?”

Evelyn blushed crimson, and hesitated for
some moments ere she spoke. “It seems

indeed discourteous, Mr. Blake, to refuse so simple a request, and at such a time; but that picture is not mine to give. That is, it was given to me—nay, I may say it was the legacy of one very, very dear to me, for he was drowned within a week after he painted it—my cousin Charlie. That picture and a letter which I had from him at the same time, are to me the most priceless things that I possess, although to others I should have thought of little value. I cannot say how it grieves me to say ‘No.’ ”

“No matter, Miss Evelyn,” returned the tutor quietly: “I will think of something else, then, of which to plunder you.—But here comes Jacob. What a pleased, excited look he has, which is a very bad sign with him. There is probably a chimney on fire.”

“Oh, Mr. Blake,” cried the groom, advancing hastily, “I want to speak to you, sir, alone, if you’d please to walk this way.”

“If there is anything the matter that concerns me, Jacob, let me know it,” interposed Evelyn authoritatively.

The servant looked from one to the other, in

terrified embarrassment, and then interrogatively at Valentine. The tutor had somehow got to be the person to whom the household looked in the case of any catastrophe—from the horse having broken fence and strayed away, to the boat having sprung a leak—it was so much more pleasant to get his wise advice than mere peevish abuse from their master.

“You may speak before Miss Evelyn,” said Valentine quickly. “What is it, man?”

“Something dreadful has happened to Mister Bentinck down at the mines, sir. The messenger——”

“I will see him at once,” interrupted Valentine.—“And you, Evelyn, look that Mrs. Woodford hears nothing of this.”


The young lady bowed her head, and turned with him rapidly towards the house. “You will not leave us just now, in this new trouble, Mr. Blake?” said she, in low quick tones, as they hurried in.

“No, Miss Evelyn, certainly not,” answered the tutor. “Stay here in the dining-room, and I will come and tell you what has happened, and without concealment.”

CHAPTER XVI.

UNDER THE FELL.

It may be easily imagined that when Bentinck and Miles Ripson left the battle-field of the Seven Sisters in possession of the tutor and his ally, they were in no enviable frame of mind. The young squire, though baffled in his wicked purpose, was yet well aware that the consequences of his attempt would be almost as serious as though it had been successful; and, as we have seen, he did not dare to show his face at home. He had money with him, the possession of which he could scarcely have explained to the satisfaction of a Court of Justice; but although it had been intended for the support of another person as well as himself, it was not a sufficient sum to



keep Master Woodford Bentinck alone for any length of time.

"I suppose you can't let me have any more cash, Miles?" was his first sullen question, as the pair were crossing Wallowdale in the direction of the wad-mine.

"You suppose right there," was the equally gruff reply. "You've bled me rather too freely, as it is, of late. It's all very well to talk of what you'll do when you are your own master; but I don't see my way, now that you've cut your cable, of even getting back my own money."

"*Your own money,*" ejaculated Bentinck contemptuously; "you mean *my own money*, or at least my father's, for that's the same thing. *His wad* that you have been stealing is *my wad*, I suppose. And then you complain, because, instead of peaching upon you, I condescend to borrow some of the proceeds."

Miles gave his companion a very ugly look, by way of reply, and trudged on in silence.

"Look here, Ripson," began the young man presently in a more conciliatory tone, "it's no good our quarrelling with one another in this

way. We are both in a devil of a hole, and we must hit upon some plan to get out of it."

"Yes; you'll get on my shoulders, and leave me in it, that I know full well, Master Ben—if I give you the opportunity. But I won't give it you. It is you, with your silly fancy for the parson's daughter—as if one girl was not as good as another—that have brought us to this pitch. Of course, there will be an outcry against you, and serve you right; but it's ten to one I shall get into trouble also. How do I know that Blake will keep his word and say nothing of our tussle——"

"He'll keep his word," interrupted Bentinck; "never fear. He is a very obstinate chap about his word."

"Well, for all that," grumbled the other, "I wish I had done for him when I had the chance.—And then there's that George Adams—he has evidently set me at defiance."

"Well, there are some Sappers at Penrith—I saw them at the wrestling ten days ago—write an anonymous letter to the sergeant, and tell him there's a deserter at Blennerdale——"

"No, no," interrupted Ripson, shaking his head; "I don't want nobody up at the mines just now. George Adams will wait. In the meantime, let me fill my pockets—not that I have got a shilling in them at present, mind."

"But in a few weeks' time you'll have more than you know what to do with, eh?" rejoined Bentineck cunningly. "You won't forget that I have said 'Halves!'" Miles Ripson here came to a halt, and fixed his eyes very steadily upon his young friend.

"Look here, Master Ben," said he fiercely: "I know what it is to be under another man's thumb, only he's dead now, I am glad to say, and I know what it is to have other people under mine. If you think you have gotten the better of me in the same fashion, let me tell you you are mistaken.—You may grin, but I'll not be in your power, as that Blake was in mine a while ago, so that I could just let him whistle a little if the tune pleased me, or stop his breathing altogether. As far as you are concerned, at all events, I mean to be a free man, that's sure."

"By all means, Miles—why not?" answered the young man doggedly.

"Ay, why not indeed? You know what I'm about, Master Ben; something that cannot fail, if all goes well, to set me up for life, and which will furnish you, too, with all you want, until the governor drops off. But if it doesn't go well: if by any accident—and I am a deuced unlucky fellow—my scheme should be blown upon before we've made our fortunes, then I shall be booked for a voyage across the herring-pond.—But *you*—how will it affect *you*?"

"Well, I shall be very sorry for you, Miles," observed the other in embarrassed tones.

"No, Master Ben," continued Ripson sternly, "that won't do. I shall take care that you shall be quite as sorry for yourself: you must have a finger in this pie—you must help me with your own hands. Then, if our little plan is discovered, we shall both escape the consequences, for the squire could never prosecute his own son; while, if, as is much more likely, we succeed, we shall come into

our property in half the time: it's deuced hard work, let me tell you, for one man, and I want help sadly.—Come, I've seen you use a pick-axe, Master Ben, just as though you were not a born gentleman; and you are not such a delicate plant but that you will thrive well enough for a week or two upon the Fell side. What say you? Take your time, and then just answer 'Yes,' or 'No;''as for me, my mind is quite made up."

Miles Ripson drew his pipe out of his waist-coat pocket (where it had miraculously escaped damage—the pipes of poor men are specially preserved—during the recent conflict), filled it, lit it, and indulged in several puffs before the young squire made any reply. When it came, it was characteristic enough.

"I suppose that one could lie quiet in your hut on the Fell as well as anywhere?" said he reflectively.

"Of course one could," returned Miles—"and a sight better too: who would ever think of looking for you there? If this tutor of yours is to be trusted, as you say, I shall certainly not be troubled with visitors. Then

with the money you have got about you, we can get plenty to eat and drink, and the best of smoke. We shall be as jolly as—as Kings,” observed Mr. Ripson, hastily substituting that word for Thieves, as being somewhat less pointedly personal. “And then think of the end of it all! Plumbago at fifty shillings a pound, and the wad-hole not to be opened for a twelvemonth!”

“Very well, Miles, so be it,” said Bentinck, with the air of a man whose resolution is fixed. “Let us see at once what kind of a lodging you have got for me. I suppose there is no chance of anybody being about the mine?”

“No; now that that fellow Adams is away you are quite safe. He has always got his eye upon the hut—curse him!—when he is at home, so you will have to keep indoors, except at night; but although he thinks he can see further into a millstone than anybody he can’t look into the heart of a whinstone fell. It does me good to think of this fool making the stable-door fast while the steed is being taken out another way!—There’s the adit, look you, very secure indeed, and with the governor’s

seals unbroken ; and yonder is my little house. Permit me to bid you welcome, Master Ben, to Wad-mine Hall."

"You seem to be in confoundedly good spirits," answered the young squire sulkily, as the pair clambered up the steep ascent that led to the hovel ; "but I, for my part, have not been accustomed to live in a pigsty set in a wilderness. What an infernal place it is !"

Certainly, Wad-mine Hall could scarcely have been pronounced "pleasantly situate," even by the euphemistic George Robins himself. The Fell was not only bare of trees, but so strewn with slag and refuse from the various wad-holes which had not repaid investigation, that there was scarcely a blade of grass to be seen upon it ; and the hut, about thirty paces from the adit so jealously secured, was by no means out of character with its surroundings. It consisted of two small rooms, the outer of which was used by the present occupant as the parlour and dining-room ; while the other, a mere closet, whose space was moreover intrenched upon by the presence of a wattle hurdle, formerly the door of some abandoned

wad-hole, which leaned against its inner wall, was the sleeping apartment. Neither of them boasted of flooring or fireplace; the walls were all unplastered; and a smell of new-dug earth pervaded the whole domicile very unpleasantly.

"You shall take the chair, young gentleman," said the miner grimly, pointing to the only chair there was; "and I will make shift with this basket turned upside down. As for the bed"—here he indicated half a dozen empty sacks thrown down in a corner of the inner room—"we will occupy that by turns; one shall sleep while the other works.—See, here is a prettier picture behind this screen than any you have got at Dewbank Hall." Miles drew aside the wattle hurdle, and revealed a dark damp hole, almost a man's height, and sufficiently broad to admit of a man's using a pickaxe, running some distance into the solid Fell.

"You have done a good bit," observed Bentinck approvingly. "How long will it take, think you, before you strike the mine?"

"Left to myself, and supposing I am right in my bearings, I could have done it in a

month. With a strong young fellow like you to help me, a fortnight ought to see us through with it."

"And what do you do with all the muck that you get out of it?" inquired the other, with a gesture of disgust. "Ugh! it smells like a grave!"

"Ay, and as the grave that gives the money to the heir, so I hope we shall find it," answered the miner. "I take the earth out every night in yonder basket, and empty it into the nearest wad-hole. I have not been an idle man since I have had this place rent-free, let me tell you. Although we are so near the adit, we have further to go to the mine; and I can tell you I am precious glad to have got a helping-hand. It has been a gruesome task digging all alone here, day and night."

"Ah," replied Bentinck sulkily, "I daresay it has; but then you're used to such things! It's a deuced sight worse for a gentleman born, like me. But how have you managed not to be found out at this work when anybody looks in?"

"Well, I take care to lock this inner door;

but nobody ever does look in, except the man that brings me bread twice a week—for I am not a pig to be kept upon oat-cake—and he always comes at the same time. Now that you are with me, one will be able to keep watch for visitors; and even if folks should come after *you*, there's a hiding-place, which nobody will suspect, for you to creep into."

Thus it was that, for several weeks after the attempted abduction of Lucy Wilson, none at Sandalthwaite could guess what had become of Bentinck Woodford. As Miles Ripson had foreseen, the hut on the Fell was not troubled with any visitors save the individual who, on Tuesdays and Fridays, provided its occupants with the only article for which the miner exhibited any delicacy of stomach.

Wad-mine Hall could not be said to lie exactly in any man's way, but it did not take the messenger a very great circuit; labour was cheap in Borrowdale, now the wad-works were closed, and Miles made it well worth his while. He was always ready for him at the door of the hut at the usual hour. On a certain Friday, however, in the late October, the mes-


senger arrived and found no Miles. He might have left the loaves upon the deal board that did duty as a table (for there was nothing extraordinary in the miner's absence), and gone his way, had not the door of the inner chamber stood open, and made him curious to see how his acquaintance was lodged in that strange place for a Christian man to choose to live in. There was little to look at, as we know; but the hurdle was not standing in its usual place. It lay on the ground, and the hole running into the Fell was of course exposed. The man went a little way in, as far as the passage seemed to go; then, full of his discovery, ran down to the manager's house, and told him.

"Miles Ripson must have gone mad, indeed, to weary himself by digging into the Fell-side like yon."

But George Adams comprehended at once, although for the first time, why Ripson had been so importunate to occupy the hut; and even guessed at the catastrophe which had actually occurred. He seized on a pickaxe and spade, and bidding his companion do the like, ran at full speed up to the hut; he lit a candle,

and entered the cavity with a beating heart. His practised eye gathered immediately that the obstacle to further progress was not the solid Fell, but a mass of new-fallen earth. "A man lies here," cried he in a terrible voice, "buried alive!"

It was of no use to dig for him at once without taking precautions, the neglect of which had evidently caused the present catastrophe. It was necessary to make fast every foot of their way with props, a number of which lay at hand for the purpose in the storehouse below, both lateral and overhead, lest the sides and roof should come in on them, as it had on him they sought. Besides an old charwoman, who cooked for the manager, and superintended his household arrangements, there was no other human being in Wallowdale beside these two; no one to help them at their labour, no one to share with them their ghastly apprehensions, their oppressive responsibility. They dug on with desperate energy, though without ever omitting their prudent precautions, and relieved one another at short intervals; but the mass to be penetrated was considerable, and the



necessity for carrying away the earth greatly impeded their operations. One held a blazing pine-torch while the other worked with the spade; a candle would not have thrown sufficient light to enable the latter to avoid doing a possible injury to him whom they did not yet despair of finding a living man. George Adams was well aware how partial such "cavings-in" often turn out to be; it might easily happen that the unhappy wretch was neither crushed nor smothered, but only cut off from the outer world. If only, then, he could be reached before the air in the confined space about him grew poisonous, they might save him yet. Actuated by this slender hope, the two brave fellows were toiling in shirt and trousers, as men do not toil even for gold. It was George who was digging when they came upon the Thing they sought, yet feared to find.

"There is something here," whispered the manager hoarsely. "Throw the light more forward."

"It is only a great basket," said his companion, looking over his shoulder.

"Nay," said George; "there's a man's arm too."

Even so near to the accomplishment of their object as that, it was no easy task to free the body from the superincumbent earth and drag it into the hut. Not until this was done, and they were about to resort to some simple measures for resuscitation, although it was too evident the man would never breathe again, did they recognise the corpse.

"Merciful Heaven!" ejaculated Adams, "it is not Ripson—it is the young squire!"

"Lor, and so it be!" exclaimed the other; "and yet I doubt for my part if I should have found it out, Mr. Manager. How like the poor young gentleman is to Miles, to *be* sure; and death alters a man so, one might very well have taken him for—— Lor, George, then Miles Ripson is in there now!"

Overcome with wonder and horror at the unlooked-for spectacle before him, Adams had indeed forgotten that this must of necessity be the case. Accusing himself of a neglect of which he was certainly not wilfully guilty, he once more seized his spade, and, regardless of

the warning of his companion, that he should wait for the underpinning props, again recommenced his work with impatient vehemence. He strove for his late enemy as though his own brother had been lying in that living grave. Nor had he to dig far. The body of the wretched miner lay within a very few feet of the place where his fellow-victim had been found, and they soon lay side by side in the little hut. The hand of the former still held the spade which he was using at the very moment of the catastrophe; Bentinck had apparently just turned to carry out the basketful of earth, when he was struck down by the falling roof. Both bodies were in a stooping position, and there was every reason to hope that death in each case had been almost instantaneous.

“What could the poor chaps ha’ been about, Mr. Adams?” inquired his companion, whose intelligence was by no means acute.

“They were enlarging the hut,” replied the manager promptly. “Miles often complained that his quarters were much too small for him.”

"Ah, so he did," rejoined the other; "those were the last words as I ever heard him say. But how rash it was of him, and he a miner too, to go digging into the Fell without underpinning. But then he allus was a risky chap."

"Well, well, the poor fellow is dead now," returned George solemnly; "and when folks are gone we should remember nothing that is not to their credit. We have done all we could for these unhappy men, God knows.—Now, make you haste to Dewbank Hall; ask for Mr. Valentine Blake; tell him all this, but see you speak to nobody else, either there or on your way; for if the news of yon," and he pointed to the sheet-white face of Bentinck Woodford, beautiful even in its last sleep—"should suddenly come to his mother's ears, maybe it would kill her."

"But you'll never stay here, Mr. George, alone?" exclaimed the other, with a shudder he did not affect to conceal.

"Why not?" returned the manager quietly. "I never feared poor Miles when he was alive—although we were not friends—and why should I fear him now?"

So the man started on his mission, and George Adams remained upon his ghastly watch. No sooner, however, was he alone than the manager re-entered the cavity, and, removing the more distant props, managed to cause a still further fall of earth, so considerably diminishing the length of the passage effected, that to persons even of keener wits than his late companion it might easily seem that the unfortunate miner and his confederate had really had no other end in view than simply to enlarge the borders of their dwelling.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW THE NEWS WAS RECEIVED AT THE HALL.

WHEN Valentine Blake entered the house to seek the messenger with whose evil tidings we are now acquainted, he had to pass by the housekeeper's room. As he did so, a wail of subdued agony, half-shriek, half-sob, smote upon his ear, so terrible in its grief, that, notwithstanding the urgency of his errand, the tutor opened the door and looked in. Mrs. Ripson sat facing him at her little table, with her head buried in her hands, and crying as though her heart would break.

"Hush, hush, woman!" said he sternly. "It is your business to mitigate the woe that has fallen upon this house, not to increase it.

If *you* give way to your feelings thus, how can you hope to calm his mother?"

"He is *my* boy—*my* boy," cried the housekeeper passionately, looking up at him with flashing eyes, "and he is dead! My beautiful Bentinck, my only boy is dead! O Heaven, it is a judgment upon me, and I deserve it!—Don't talk to me, Mr. Blake; don't listen to what I am saying. But he was buried alive, I tell you—buried alive; and you ask me not to weep!"

"Is this really true?" asked Valentine, greatly shocked.

"Yes, Bentinck is dead," groaned the wretched woman; "and I was the only one who loved him; and he loved me too; O yes, my own boy loved me dearly, and he was buried alive."

Valentine softly reclosed the door, and went out to where the messenger awaited him, and heard his tale, which he had not been able to keep altogether to himself, as he had been instructed to do. But Mrs. Woodford was, as usual, in her own room, and had not been disturbed, and her husband was still asleep upon

the sofa in the drawing-room. A duty, sad and trying indeed, lay before the tutor, but he did not shrink from it for a moment. First, he returned to Evelyn, according to his promise, and told her all. She was greatly agitated, and shed many tears, but almost her first words were: "I will go to my aunt; she had better hear this news from me—at least, I think I can break it to her better than Mrs. Ripson can."

Valentine nodded grave approval, and took his way at once to the drawing-room. If what he had to do was not done immediately it seemed as though he could never do it. The Black Squire's slumbers were rarely light of late, and he did not hear Valentine enter the room. He was dreaming, and his dreams ran upon the favourite topic of his waking thoughts. "Shut it up, and the price will rise," muttered he. "It will be worth its weight in gold, I tell you. The wad, the wad!"—The tutor shook his arm.—"Hullo, Mr. Blake! Why don't you let me sleep? Why don't she keep on playing? I certainly am the most unlucky—— Why, what's the matter? They

haven't been and robbed the wad-mine, have they?"

"Your son Bentinck has met with an accident," said Valentine very gravely.

"Has he?" returned the squire coldly. "I daresay it served him right."

"He is very sorely hurt; nay, sir, all human help is useless—he is dead."

Mr. Woodford, who had raised himself upon his elbow, as though to get up and be doing, at the beginning of the tutor's speech, sank back upon the sofa with a groan. Then Valentine narrated briefly the details of the catastrophe that had occurred, to which the other listened with scarce a word of interruption. When all had been told there was a silence for a minute or so; and then, in a tone very different from his usual dictatorial one, but still resolute and firm, Mr. Woodford whispered hoarsely: "Please to leave me, Mr. Blake, and be so good as to draw yonder blinds down."

Valentine shut out the twilight accordingly, and left the squire to the gloom and his own kindred thoughts. A vehicle had been already

sent to fetch the body of the dead lad, and there was nothing more to be done at present, so the tutor sat in the dining-room alone. It seemed as though Dewbank Hall could never know cheerfulness any more; but after a little the door opened and let in the sunshine. Evelyn came to tell him that her aunt had received the dreadful news with wonderful tranquillity. Her state of health had probably been of actual advantage to her, rendering her, as it did, incapable of any violent emotion. "God's will be done!" she had said, and bidden her niece send Mrs. Ripson to her.

"Mary seems really more overcome by the sad tidings than my aunt herself," said Evelyn; "and what seems so strange, although it is true they were an ill-assorted pair, the loss of her husband seems to move her scarcely at all; she mourns for my unhappy cousin as though he were her own son. Poor boy—poor boy!" Here Evelyn herself gave way a little, but presently inquired how her uncle had borne the news.

"I think he feels it very deeply," said Valentine; "much more so than he shows, I

am sure.—Hark! that is his step upon the stairs. Perhaps he is coming down here.”

“Dear Uncle Ernest,” murmured Evelyn, sobbing, “he has been always very, very kind to me.” She rose and waited for him, ready to throw her arms about his neck and comfort him all she could; but the footsteps—slower than usual, but not less steady and decisive—passed by the dining-room, and on to the study. That was the room the Black Squire always sought on occasions of importance or calamity, just as a pious Catholic seeks his oratory; and he went in and locked the door. While the rest of the household kept watch through that weary night, and listened for the sound of wheels, and came out ever and anon to listen for them in the damp autumn air, he never stirred; and when at last they heard it, and the carriage came, the squire did but leave his room to look upon the ghastly burden which it bore, and then returned, without a tear and with a face of stone, to his desk and papers. “What the law gives her she must now have,” he muttered; “I might have known it would be so. All things conspire

against me. But not one shilling more," added he bitterly, "shall ever fall to her or hers—not one."

So, writing and re-writing, and tearing up and writing again, Ernest Woodford passed the night, underneath the room where his dead son lay ; and not until the morning was far advanced did he put his pen aside, and feel secure against his enemy, because his will (so long delayed) at last was made.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

BENTINCK WOODFORD was not buried yet, but the news of his death and that of Miles Ripson had flown fast and far. With the exception of the housekeeper, there was no human being that really mourned him. It seemed terrible to some—to good Parson Wilson especially—that he should have been so suddenly cut off—as was only too probable (although, thanks to the precaution of George Adams, no one suspected the nature of the act in which he had been engaged when death had struck him), without repentance for his wickedness. Lucy, indeed, was deeply shocked, but with her sorrow was mingled, in spite of herself, a certain sense of relief: her love for the self-

willed lad had never been unalloyed with fear, and since she had become convinced of the baseness of his intentions, the former passion had dwindled to almost nothing, and the latter had increased to absolute terror. Mr. Woodford himself, no doubt, as Valentine had said, felt more than he showed; but he saw in that dumb cold face, which death itself had forborne as yet to rob of its manly beauty, the failure of his own cherished schemes for the future quite as much as any present loss. On the fifth day came a not unexpected missive from Selina.

“Will she mock at my disappointment?” thought the squire, staring at the letter with knitted brows; “or will she venture to condole with me upon what has happened?” He carried it about with him half the day, not having the courage to break the seal. Something within him seemed to warn him against its contents, and at the same time to forbid his returning it unread. At last he read it. Valentine met him running along the avenue towards the house, and taking no more notice of him—although he almost touched his gar-

ments as he went by—than if he had been a tree. Had the poor squire's mind, unable to relieve itself by natural grief, given way under the pressure of his calamities? He certainly looked like one who had lost his reason. Valentine, seriously afraid of some mischance, followed him hastily home, just in time to hear him close the door of Mrs. Woodford's chamber, and fasten it on the inside. Husband and wife scarcely ever met now except at meal-times; they had only seen one another once since their son's death; it was in the highest degree unlikely, in case of anything important having occurred, that the squire should consult her upon the matter at all. Alarmed, yet not knowing what to do, Valentine went to Mrs. Ripson's room to ask her opinion. She knew much more about her mistress than anybody else, even than Evelyn. The housekeeper, looking very comely in her deep mourning, for grief had improved her appearance, as it sometimes does, by refining it, was reading intently a bundle of old letters. She was shedding tears, but not in her late passionate way, and when she looked up there was a

light upon her face which he had never seen before there. He thought it very strange, when the boy she had loved so was to be buried on the morrow, and at the same time with her dead husband ; but his business was too pressing to admit of any remark upon the circumstance. He told her what he had just seen, and asked whether she could account in any way for her master's conduct. Had he ever been subject to any hallucination ? or had anything really occurred to make him angry ? for the expression of his face had not only been wild, but furious. Mrs. Ripson knew of nothing that could explain the matter—absolutely nothing whatever. There was a dull sound of voices in the room above, and Mr. Woodford's footsteps crossed it slowly once or twice.

“He is doing no harm,” said the house-keeper quietly. “He is not in one of his tantrums. And if he were it would not much hurt my mistress. She was never easily frightened by anything ; and of late, poor lady, she has been past all fear. She is like a statue. She would just as soon die as live.—

Hush ! he is coming out again." The door at the top of the stairs was flung open, and a voice at once both rough and sharp, like the rasping of a file, cried : " Mary Ripson, Mary Ripson !"

" He has found it out," whispered the house-keeper, starting to her feet with a face from which all colour had suddenly fled. " I durst not go, Mr. Blake, I durst not indeed."

" Found *what* out?" asked Valentine, while the squire, standing at his wife's door, did not cease to call for her attendant.

" O sir, you will know soon enough," returned she ; " but if I go, will you promise me that he shall do me no harm ? If I stamp on the floor thus, will you run up and break in the door—I am not to blame ; I only did what his wife told me—will you promise me, Mr. Blake ?"

" Yes, yes," answered the tutor hastily. " I will help you, if need be ; but make haste ; doubtless your mistress is ill, and that is why your master wants you."

But Mary shook her head, and went upstairs with a scared face and trembling limbs.

Mr. Woodford was waiting for her, with a searching look in his black and shining eyes she had never seen before.

"Go in!" he said; then closed and locked the door behind her. His wife was upon the sofa, not lying down as usual, but sitting upright without aid from cushion or pillow, and staring straight before her.

"Never mind her," exclaimed the Black Squire harshly, as the housekeeper turned mechanically towards her mistress—"but listen to *me*. Keep your eyes from her, and answer for yourself without prompting." He placed a letter in her hand, and bade her read it, and watched her—while her shaking fingers strove to hold it steady—with relentless gaze.

"Is this true what this woman writes?" asked he, gasping for breath. "Has there been a plot to rob her of her rights? Is that dead boy, in yonder room, your son? Have you, and my own wife here, fixed this blot of shame upon me, that she talks of?—Speak—curse you—speak!"

Mary answered nothing: she knew not what to say, because she knew not what her

mistress had already said. She felt like one put to the question that has need of all his fortitude, but yet will not betray.

A voice came from the sofa, clear and stern :
“ Tell him.”

“ Your mistress has found her voice at last,” quoth Mr. Woodford bitterly ; “ now find you yours. Lies cannot serve you now ; tell the whole truth.”

Once more the housekeeper hesitated, and again her mistress bade her tell him all—
“ All that concerns *your* part, that is,” struck in Mr. Woodford—“ your mistress shall answer for her own share presently. Who set you on to perpetrate this crime ?”

“ It was Dr. Warton,” answered Mary boldly.

“ No ; it was I !” exclaimed Mrs. Woodford—
“ I alone ! She dare not tell you the whole truth ; but *I* dare, Ernest Woodford ! Listen ! Yonder woman is not to blame, for she had no thought of fraud. She only deemed that I, being childless and without my husband’s love, desired to win it. She promised (being with child) that if she bore a boy I should adopt it

as my own. She was well pleased that her son should be a gentleman, and glad enough at the prospect of leaving her brutal husband's roof for this, where she could live in comfort. Had she borne a girl she would have kept it; and the child which I pretended I was to have, but had not, would have been given out to have died. But all happened as I wished. She bore a son—it was said to be a daughter only to avert suspicion—and it was brought here the night after its birth by Mrs. Ripson the post-mistress, and afterwards suckled by her daughter-in-law, its own mother."

"And why did you plot this scheme?" asked the squire, with his hand pressed to his forehead, and speaking in suppressed and husky tones.

"For the same reason that I came back to live with you as your wife a second time—to be revenged upon your sister. If you were anxious that no son of hers should inherit your estate, I was ten times more so. I have suffered at her hands such things that if I could slay her with a word as I sit here, I would not hesitate to speak it."

"And all these many years you kept this secret to yourself, away from me!" said Mr. Woodford slowly.

"Why not? You are unjust enough in most things, but an obedient slave to the mere letter of the law. You note from that vile woman stings you now because she speaks of Fraud, and calls you Cheat, forsooth. Have you not defrauded *me* of all the kindness that a husband owes his wife? Have you not cheated me, from first to last, of love, respect, protection, and all that is a woman's due? And yet, because she taunts you with an illegal act, you feel ashamed, humiliated, disgraced."

"Disgraced, disgraced!" echoed the wretched man.

"I am glad of it," answered she dispassionately: "you know then something now of what I have felt for more than half my lifetime—from the moment when I became your wife until this day. You will never persuade that woman, no, nor persuade the world, but that you have been a party to this scheme."

"No, never!" murmured the unhappy

squire. He looked ten years older than he had done an hour ago; he had sunk into a chair, and sat there with his hands drooping before him, as though in man's last stage, a very imbecile.

"Look you, Ernest Woodford," she went on; "I might have spared you this; I might have told you long ago—I think I should have done so—but for one thing. True, I never loved you; but every woman has some tenderness for him with whom her life is linked, however evilly; and if you had ever shown one spark of pity for me—if you had not wished me dead——"

Her husband raised one hand in feeble deprecation.

"Nay, you lie!" said she. "When, for all you knew, I was in the pains of childbirth—when, if ever, a man should feel compassion for his wife, and wish her well—you wrote my death-doom. It is in yonder desk among the papers in the inner drawer; you know your own handwriting; look at it."

Ernest Woodford staggered to his feet, and felt his way by chair and table to the place

she indicated, and there remained, fumbling among the papers, like one in the dark.

At last he found it: it was the little note which nearly twenty years ago he had written to Dr. Warton, and thrust under his wife's chamber-door: "*At all risks, save the boy.*"

"If in my woman's heart one drop of fondness had remained for your worthless self," she continued, "those words would have frozen it. From the moment that I read them I hated you only less than I hated your sister. When the boy you supposed to be your offspring turned out——"

"My son is lying dead in the next room," interposed the housekeeper suddenly.

"True; I had forgotten," resumed her mistress, with a touch of tenderness. "Whenever you have been disappointed, Ernest Woodford, I have been pleased; and whenever crossed, save by Selina Murphy, I have been glad at heart. If you were to die to-day, I should only not rejoice: it would move me less than when, a month ago, poor wretched Herbert Warton died of drink."

The squire, with his hand in his breast,

pocket, into which he had thrust the slip or paper, tottered to the door without a word. Mary, afraid *for* him rather than *of* him now—he looked so worn and aged—stepped forward to assist him, as he bungled with the lock, but he waved her off, and let himself out at last. Step by step, and holding by the banisters to keep his footing, he slowly went downstairs. The dining-room door was open, and he could see Evelyn standing by the window, looking sadly out upon the lawn, all yellowed by the autumn leaves. Deep in thought, she did not hear him, and he stood gazing at her with a yearning tenderness that would have brought her to him in a moment—had she only known—with open arms: but almost immediately the loving look passed away, and the same anguish which had lined his face throughout the recent interview usurped its place. Heaven only knew what depended upon whether Evelyn chanced to turn her head that moment or not. She did not, however; and he passed on to his study, and went in.

After a few minutes, the housekeeper came down to the room adjoining, where the tutor

was keeping watch, according to his promise. "Have you seen master?" inquired she with anxiety.

"Nay," he said. "I thought he was still with you in Mrs. Woodford's room."

"No, no," said she; "he left it some time since—and, O sir, he took away with him the laudanum bottle from my mistress's desk."

Valentine started to his feet, and went at once to the study: he knocked, but there was no answer; he tried the door, and it was locked. He ran out into the garden, and looked in through the open window. The squire was seated at the desk, with his head upon it, resting between his hands. An empty bottle lay on the floor, beside his chair. Before him lay a mass of papers, and his will drawn out at length, but unsigned. That was all labour in vain now, since the dead have nothing to leave. Valentine forced the sash, and broke into the room, but he had come too late. Ernest Woodford had already breathed his last.

CHAPTER XIX.

SELINA'S HOUR OF TRIUMPH.

IF, after the elopement of their minister's daughter, the death of their squire's son, and the suicide of their squire, the good folks of Sandalthwaite had any capacity for astonishment remaining to them, a carriage-and-four dashing through their village would certainly have evoked it. And such a phenomenon did take place upon the very day when Ernest Woodford was laid in the little churchyard, and almost at the very hour. When, indeed, the little party of mourners returned to the Hall, after having attended his obsequies, they found the said carriage at the door. The visitors it had brought had already established themselves in the dining-room; and when Mrs.

Woodford, assisted on either side by Valentine and Evelyn, tottered feebly into that apartment she found herself face to face with Selina Murphy and her son. The two women had not met for upwards of a quarter of a century ; but Time, that sunders Friendship, and saps Love itself, often only improves Hatred, like good wine ; and so it was in this case. At the sight of her ancient enemy the widow withdrew her arms from their supports, walked with painful steadiness (like one overcome with drink, and anxious to conceal his condition) to the nearest chair, and sat down with her face to the foe. Mrs. Murphy, in a green gown, which did not become her complexion so completely as it exhibited her contempt for the memory of the deceased squire, remained standing, with her back to the fireplace, and one hand upon the shoulder of her Woody, in a classical attitude. Valentine and Evelyn ranged themselves by Mrs. Woodford's chair ; Mary Ripson and some of the domestics stood, hesitating between their respect for their superiors and their desire to witness the impending scene, outside the open door.

"Come in—come in, all of you," exclaimed Mrs. Murphy imperiously.—"And you, you lying cheat" (this compliment was addressed to the housekeeper), "above all, for what I have to say is no secret."

"Pardon me, madam," observed Valentine gravely; "but I think you can hardly have been aware of what has recently happened in this house, and particularly of the sad nature of the transaction in which we have just been engaged."

"I am quite aware of it, Mr. Blake," returned the lady haughtily; "and I would recommend you to mind your own business—if, indeed, you have any business here at all, now that the brat of that infamous hussy" (here, by a short, sharp nod, which seemed to say: "*I understand you, madam,*" she again indicated the housekeeper) "is dead and gone. I am fully informed of all that has happened; and if I had been in time for the coroner's inquest, I could have given some evidence which would have altered the verdict to *Felo-de-se*. If ever a man deserved to be buried at the junction of four cross-roads, with a hedge-

stake through his breast, it was my brother, Ernest Woodford."

"Madam," exclaimed Valentine with indignation, "your conduct is most unbecoming and unfeeling. I cannot trust myself to express to *you*—a female—what I think of it; but I would ask your son there, Mr. Claude Woodford Murphy, to recall you to some sense of what is due, at least, to public decency."

"My ma knows precious well what she's about," observed the young gentleman appealed to, sagaciously shutting his left eye. "The game's up for all these people, I can tell you; and if you're not a fool, Blake, you'll come over at once to the right side."

"Hold your tongue, Woody!" interposed his mother sharply. "What is it to us whether Bentinck Ripson's tutor is on our side or not?—However, since you seem to be the spokesman, Mr. Blake, may I ask when the late Mr. Ernest Woodford's will is to be read, for that is what we are come down here to listen to."

"He has not left a will, madam."

If intense pleasure has the power, as some contend, of making even the plainest counte-

nance good-looking, Selina Murphy might have sat to her husband for Minerva in the "Judgment of Paris," notwithstanding her green gown.

Master Woody's mouth emitted a whistle of satisfaction, so prolonged that it might almost have proceeded from some locomotive which had received the signal, "Line all Clear."

"Or rather," continued the tutor, "he has left a will, of very recent date, and expressing, no doubt, his last intentions, but it has not been signed."

"I don't want to look at it," remarked Selina contemptuously, as the document was laid before her. "I can guess all the wrong my brother would have done, had he had the power. —I suppose no one is prepared to dispute that my son here is heir-at-law, *now?*"

She cast a defiant glance at the circle before her, but there was no reply.

"I think, madam, it would be but just," observed the tutor, after a long pause, "to peruse that will. I am aware, from what the late Mr. Woodford told me, of the nature of some of its contents. He intended, I know,

to make some provision for a certain person, otherwise almost entirely unprovided for, but to whom he was much attached, and under great obligations; and doubtless you would wish to give effect——”

“I wish nothing of the kind,” returned Selina fiercely. “If, as I suppose, you refer to Miss Evelyn Sefton, I am very glad that she is left to shift for herself.—You have been very well treated here, miss” (here she turned her malicious eyes upon her niece), “*considering that your aunt Clementina had a son and heir.* Doubtless, you were in the plot too. You were to have your share in the robbery if the fraud had borne ripe fruit. I tell you all, *I wish it had.* I wish that the child which my sister-in-law purchased of Mary Ripson, to be passed off as her own, and did so pass off, in order to rob me and mine, were now alive; for then I would prosecute you all for a conspiracy, and lay you by the heels in jail.—I would have done that, Clementina Woodford; nay, if the law would have granted it, I would have had you whipped as well. Some of you present seem to be astonished at what I am telling

you, as though it were a new thing. That may be mere pretence, or it may not ; but if the plot which has been going on here for these last twenty years was unknown to you it has been more or less plain to *me* from the beginning. When I received the letter which told me that Clementina Woodford had a son I said to myself: 'This is a lie ;' and the one object of my life from that time to this has been to find it out. I knew nothing then of how the deceit had been effected, but I knew that there had been deceit as clearly as though I had seen it with my own eyes. For many and many a year I waited for my opportunity, and at last it came in yonder man—Valentine Blake. I sent him down here, on the pretence of being tutor to the boy——”

Here, for the first time, Mrs. Woodford took her eyes from off her mortal foe, to fix them for a moment upon Valentine, while Evelyn hastily turned towards him an inquiring glance, but more full of pain than even of surprise. But the tutor returned the gaze of neither ; he kept his face steadily fronting that of Selina Murphy, and over it was creeping slowly that

cold relentless light which might have warned even her, had she been mistress of herself in that great hour of triumph.

“ I sent him down here,” continued she, “ as the boy’s tutor, but pledged to furnish me with all the details necessary for my purpose. His first letter supplied me with all I needed to corroborate my own suspicions, and to direct them aright, but not enough for legal proof. My son, here, came down in person, and gathered such evidence from one of the accomplices in this vile plot as made my position certain. Still, there was nothing for it but to wait: until my brother died I had not been wronged, except in intention; nor could I right myself, nor punish—as I will punish yet, if public shame can do it—the wrong-doers. I was used to waiting, and with this hour in view I could have waited for twice twenty years. But when this supposititious lad met with his end—and I am sorry for it, since it robs me of a just revenge—I wrote to Ernest Woodford, telling him what a Knave he was, and how I had known it all along, and that he had schemed for nothing, even if the boy had lived——”

"It was no scheme of Mr. Woodford's," interposed the housekeeper impulsively: "do not slander a dead man, and he your brother, Mrs. Murphy. He never knew until you told him that Bentinck Woodford was not his own son. Your letter killed him."

"I don't believe it, woman," returned Mrs. Murphy coldly. "He killed himself through baffled spite; but, nevertheless, I thank you for your admission. It will not be necessary, since you own you carried out this fraud—no matter at whose instigation—to go into the proofs: to visit the grave in which you pretended to bury your dead baby, but in whose coffin are only sticks and stones. You and your mistress are, at all events, two vile plotters—whom I wish I could punish as you deserve—and you have confederates here, no doubt. They will now be sorry for their partisanship, if not repentant for their dishonesty. — You, my brother's widow, will have what the law awards you, for your life, which, since you have no jointure, as I believe is the case, will be Nothing. You will find it difficult, out of the income which remains to you, to reward your

accomplices to their satisfaction.—You, sir”—here she cast a contemptuous glance at Valentine—“who, false to the trust reposed in you, have chosen to cast in your lot with my enemies, will leave this house the beggar that you came.—And you, Evelyn Sefton, instead of being the heiress that you counted on (and that *he* counted on also, if I am not mistaken), have fawned upon your uncle and this woman for these many years in vain, and must now get your own living. Don’t come to me for a character, that’s all.”

Mrs. Murphy, like the prudent Irish post-boy, had “kept a gallop for the avenue:” her last sentence was what her artist husband might have justly designated as “a characteristic specimen of her early style”—malevolent, concise, and practical.

Evelyn bending down over Mrs. Woodford’s chair was whispering some soothing words into the widow’s ear, but the flush upon her cheek betrayed that one at least of the barbed arrows of Mrs. Murphy’s speech had struck her.

“If you have quite done, Selina Murphy, I

should like to say something," said Valentine Blake, in clear incisive tones.

"Who are you, sir, that dare to call me by my Christian name?" returned that lady angrily.

"One that has a right to do so, being—I blush to say it—of your kith and kin. I am your nephew, Charles Woodford."

Evelyn started, uttering an inarticulate cry, and would have fallen to the ground had not Valentine caught her in his arms.

"It is false!" cried Mrs. Murphy vehemently, but her face grew deadly white, and her thin lips pinched and parched the while she spoke.


"It is true," continued Valentine sternly. "When I left this roof eighteen years ago, an exile—thanks to you—from my native land, it was to pursue a profession which I detested. You used to call me headstrong and self-willed, Aunt Selina, and perhaps you were so far right. When I got to Rio I found the calling my uncle had chosen for me insupportable. For some time previously—again thanks to your bitter tongue—we had not been on good terms. The first letter I got from him, when

I was across the seas, and sorely needed kindness, was a stern one. There was something in it worse than sternness; but no matter: he is dead, and I have long forgiven it. I had but one friend in all the world: the faithful heart that beats against my own this moment. She was then a child, well treated by her uncle—though not by you—and to whom I could be of no further service. At that time, I by chance became acquainted with Giuseppe Garibaldi, who was about to take out letters of marque, under the republic of Rio Grande, against Brazil. His rendezvous, I knew, was the island of Marica, in the harbour of Rio, where my fellow-clerks and I used sometimes to boat, after office-hours. On the day before he sailed we did so, and I contrived to slip overboard, as if by accident, swam to the island, and offered myself as a volunteer. For more than sixteen years I was a soldier of fortune, hearing nothing of this dear one, but hoping for the best. My affection could do nought for her, I knew, and indeed it would set those against her who should have been her natural protectors: but I never forgot you,

Evelyn, never, never! When I was at last free to come to England, it was you only that I had in my thoughts. There would be no one else to welcome me. But I was fully determined not to discover myself unless it was for your own good. You perhaps had mourned for your old playfellow when you thought him dead; but that grief must have passed away long, long ago. If I had found you married, it was only what I expected to do. I doubted—you will forgive me now—whether you would ever remember me at all. I was very certain that none of you would recognise me. You do not do so, I see, even now.”

“I should think not,” observed Mrs. Murphy, smiling scornfully, but fretfully beating her foot upon the floor. “It is just as likely that a monkey should grow up to be a bear, as that you were ever my nephew.”

“On the third day, madam, after my return to England,” continued Valentine, without taking any notice of this disparaging image, “I met by chance your husband, Claude Murphy. I did not even know at that time that you were a married woman. I did not



know of the existence of your son, or of that of Bentinck Woodford. I cherished no ill will against you, Heaven knows. Your husband had won upon me by his pleasant, kindly manner; I was quite prepared to forget the harshness with which you had treated me of old, and even—if not for your own sake, yet for his—to be friendly and cordial. I met you at your own house that very afternoon; I partook of your hospitality.”

“Serpent!” hissed Selina between her teeth.

“I saw you at your best, and, as I suppose, you wished yourself to be seen. If I had found you kind, nay, womanly—if there had been any sign of tenderness about you—I would have told you who I was, and spared you the humiliation of this moment. But I found you implacable, unmerciful, malevolent, as I left you, and even worse. If you had not—to serve your own base ends—put this tutorship into my hands, I still should have come down to Sandalithwaite; I had returned to England for that purpose; but, thanks to you, I became, under the guise of tutor to that

unhappy youth, an inmate of the very house in which I had passed my boyhood."

"A hypocrite by his own showing," observed Mr. Woodford Murphy, suggesting a point for the jury.

"Nay, Mr. Fosbrook," returned the tutor coldly; "we are sometimes compelled by circumstances, as you know by experience, to use other names than our own; and as for my obtaining the situation, your mother herself procured it for me under conditions, and those conditions I have fulfilled. Through me, although unwillingly indeed—for I had no suspicion of the use to which she was putting my information—she learned the details of the lamentable scheme which death destroyed before it reached maturity, and fortunately before any wrong had been committed.—You have suggested, Mrs. Murphy, that I have been of late a consenting party to it; but now you know who I am you will scarcely accuse me of joining a conspiracy the effect of which would be to disinherit myself. I knew nothing with certainty of the matter—although I do not deny I have had my suspicions for some time

—until Mr. Woodford's death, after which Mary Ripson confessed all to me. Up to that time I had never given a thought to the subject of the heirship of the Woodford estate. It did not seem to me that I had any part in the question. I was most glad, however, to learn from my employer that he intended amply to provide for Evelyn. It was not for me to run the risk of depriving her of her uncle's bounty by the offer of my penniless hand. Had he lived, and matters remained as they were, I should by this time have been in Italy, not without hope, indeed, of one day having the right to press my darling's cheek to mine, but looking to it as a bliss far off, and to be patiently waited for.—But we have loved one another, Evelyn, all along, I think ; is it not so ? You believe all that I have been saying, do you not ? You acknowledge me to be your cousin ?”

“ Yes, yes, and more,” returned Evelyn tenderly : always beautiful, she seemed to have re-entered her first youth, but with such a glow of happiness on her fair face as it had never worn when she was a maiden of eighteen.

"Otherwise, did you need proofs, they are here, Evy," continued Valentine. "In this pocket-book—see—I have the letter in round text which your childish fingers penned to me while I was in Rio: and in this locket, at the back of Giuseppe's portrait, there is a tress of golden hair I robbed you of at parting. It has often been as a streak of sunlight to me when clouds were darkest."

"It is easy to be deluded," observed Mrs. Murphy scornfully, "when self-interest favours our conviction. Of course that girl will credit a story which, if true, would give her at once a lover and a fortune."

"The fox dies hard," returned Valentine quietly: "but I know by your look and tone, madam, that I have done more than persuade a willing believer—I have convinced a stubborn woman against her will. If you really, however, desire further evidence, cross-examine me concerning events that took place here in my boyhood, and see if I do not recollect them far, far better—for have I not lived upon the memory of them?—than those who have dwelt upon the spot during the intervening years.—

You are silent. I should have preferred such questions to come from yourself; but since you disdain to ask them, I appeal to any here who may still doubt the truth of what I say."

There was a long pause, and then, all of a sudden, an unexpected voice cried: "Kiss me, Charlie."

It was the first time Mrs. Woodford had spoken throughout the scene.

Her voice seemed to break the charm which held the rest in silence: "Master Charlie, Master Charlie!" was echoed by many a voice, and many a hand was stretched forth in honest welcome.

"Thank you, old friends, thank you," said Valentine, deeply moved.

"It seems to me, ma, you have made a precious mess of it all," muttered Woody discontentedly. "This comes of your being so very clever. I always thought that Blake was a bad lot from the time when he was a model; but you would have it, it was all right."

"My trust was indeed misplaced," answered his mother solemnly, "but I did it for the best.

It is difficult to plumb the depths of man's depravity."

"And all the money spent for nothing," continued the prudent youth, "and the extra pair of horses that you *would* have put on for the 'triumphal entry!' O dear, O dear!—Look here, Mr. Charles Woodford, if that is really your name——"

"Be silent, Woody," exclaimed his mother authoritatively; "you shall not demean yourself by speaking to that man!"

"Pooh, pooh; *you* are a pretty one to advise folks," continued the disobedient lad. "Why, I am sure *pa* himself could not have mismanaged the business worse than you have done. Always know when you're beat.—Perhaps Mr. Charles will make some compromise."

Valentine (biting his lip, to repress a smile) gravely shook his head.

"Well then—look—you will give us some compensation for the expense we have been put to—two journeys to Sandalthwaite, and two hundred and fifty pounds paid to that scoundrel Dr. Warton."

"No; *one* hundred and fifty pounds," returned Valentine quietly. "I saw you count the notes into his hand with my own eyes in Sandalthwaite churchyard."

"Let us start, ma," ejaculated Woody despairingly; "there is nothing to be got out of a mean eavesdropper like this." And off went mother and son in their postchaise-and-four, but by no means so triumphantly as they had come.

"There is only one person who has not shaken hands with me, nor wished me joy," observed Valentine gravely, as the noise of the carriage-wheels died away. The whole party were still in the dining-room, for not one had stirred to speed the late parting guests.

"I am not worthy to do so: no honest man would wish to take my hand, Master Charlie," answered the housekeeper sobbing.

"Don't you be so sure of that," returned Valentine, smiling goodnaturedly. "At all events, *I* shall take it; and since the offence committed has been against *me*—for *I*, you see, was the person whom you strove to keep out of my birthright—surely it remains with me, and

nobody else, to forgive it. From this moment let all who have any respect for Master Charlie remember this—I do not wish to hear of it any more. Aunt Clementina”—here, looking upon Mrs. Woodford's pained and woeworn face, his voice sank to very tender tones—"the night before you left this house, under sad circumstances, a quarter of a century ago, you did not forget, amid your own sorrows, to think of those of others. Evelyn and I were children then—not very happy ones; and you called us to you, and bade us love one another; and you told me to grow up a soldier and a gentleman; and when I married 'my little wife,' as I used to call her then, to be sure to treat her kindly; and then you said: 'God bless you, dears.' Will you please to say so now once more?"


Mrs. Woodford's lips moved feebly, but only the pair who stood beside her chair could catch her whispered speech. "I am a wicked woman, dears, and have scarcely a right to speak of God at all; but I remember the time you mention, Charlie, and what I said. I said that you two had a chance—for many men and women, alas, have not—of being all in all

to one another ; and you will be so—yes, I am sure you will. To see you thus gives me what I have not known for twenty years—a moment's genuine happiness. God bless you both, my dears."

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.


THE last chapter of a novel, when the future position of the principal personages has been indicated, is like the second quarter of an hour of our meeting with a home-friend after years of absence. We have learned how father and mother are, and sisters and brothers, and all the nearest and dearest to us. Excitement has abated, but it interests us still to hear how it has been faring with our less intimate friends, and even acquaintances. With the great masters of the art of story-telling, we look for the final position of the inferior characters exactly as if they were of flesh and blood; as if one should ask: "And, by-the-by, what became of old So-and-so, *you* remember, who



used to live at what d'ye call it?" Now, although the present writer is by no means such a fool as some critics have endeavoured to make out, he has little hope of playing this part of Chorus to an audience engrossed and attentive to the last. Some pestilent members of it, whom we have been vainly perhaps addressing as "Dear Readers" all along, are already putting on their hats and coats, now that they perceive the climax has arrived, without paying the least regard to that more discriminating portion of the assembly who wish to see our little drama played out to the end. This is discourteous, to say the least of it, to the poor playwright, who has done his best to please, and has worked very hard (though joyously) to do so for these twelve months. Sit down, we pray you, for five minutes longer, when the curtain will fall.

George Adams has married his first love. This, perhaps, does not please you; I am sorry for that, but I am only stating facts. Between ourselves, George was always a much more sentimental sort of person than his Mary, although she was so greatly addicted to

romance-reading ; and although her conduct in permitting her own offspring to be palmed off upon society as the heir of Dewbank Hall offended his sense of justice exceedingly, "Master Charlie," who, as we know, had the greatest influence, persuaded him to overlook that. His profession (if you recollect) was that of an Overlooker. Perhaps Mary Ripson was not in need of much persuasion, but she really had considerable excuse for her share in the matter. That packet of letters which Valentine found her reading with such eager interest was the immediate cause of her second marriage. It had been found upon the dead body of her late husband, and consisted of the whole of the intercepted correspondence between herself and George. Why Miles had preserved what would have done him nothing but harm I cannot tell, but in that he only acted as we find vicious, and especially criminal, persons continually do act. Perhaps it pleased his natural malevolence to refer to these avowals of affection, which were never (as he thought) to meet the eyes for which they were written ; and doubtless they nursed his wrath



against his unhappy wife, and kept it warm, when maybe his conscience needed some apology for his ill treatment of her. We have all of us reasons for what we do ; but certainly Miles Ripson's wishes were not directly carried out by the falling of these interesting missives into his widow's hands. They had all the effect—nay, more than the effect—which they would have had upon her had they just come through the post, instead of being delayed in delivery for twenty years. At eight-and-thirty she felt more in love with George Adams than ever.

After mutual explanations, diplomatically conducted by Master Charlie, the high contracting parties were married. I have said that Miles Ripson's wishes were not *directly* carried out ; but scandal, which, as we have been made aware, flourishes to some extent even at Sandalthwaite, does venture to affirm that George is not so entirely the master of his own house as Miles was. He has given up his situation at the wad-mine—the locality, as may be easily imagined, being very distasteful to Mrs. Adams—and dwells at Ander Nook, where there is now another room added to the

accommodations of the house, that would have made old Tyson Harrison stare more than any of his immediate successor's vagaries—namely, a library, all fiction. Mr. and Mrs. Adams, are, however, a happy pair.

Mr. Wilson is still alive; the last representative, perhaps, of that race of simple English pastors such as Chaucer's verse portrays :

Such as the heaven-taught skill of Herbert drew ;
And tender Goldsmith crowned with deathless praise.

His comely wife is still, by Sandalthwaite notation, a young woman ; and their daughter Lucy has grown an obedient damsel, waiting patiently, with a prudent horror of all clandestine attachments, for the husband that her parents may provide for her. It is rumoured that this favoured mortal is likely to be the new curate of the parish, who has been introduced by Mr. Charles Woodford, and at his expense, to lighten her father's labours—an agreeable young divine, with the most accurate of white cravats, and a buttonless waistcoat, wherein he invests himself by means, if not miraculous, at all events unintelligible to his parishioners.

Claude Murphy still works hard at his profession, and has gained considerable reputation of late for his really beautiful flesh-colours. His paintings are of the Etty school. Having said this, it is almost unnecessary to add that he is separated from his wife. After her return from that unsuccessful expedition to Dewbank Hall, Selina's temper became absolutely unbearable, and Claude left her—with those four thousand pounds intact, for his share in the interest of which he had passed twenty years of what the American Southerners (aptly enough in his case) used to term “the domestic institution.” At fifty-four, Claude began the world again, with little, as he himself expressed it, save a light heart and a thin pair of breeches; “but then,” as he added with his pleasant smile, “it was such a novelty to be allowed to wear them.” Matters would have gone rather hard with him, but for a certain seventy-five pounds which reached him with great regularity every three months. This gratuity is anonymous, or rather in the interior of the first packet which contained them was written only these few words:

“From Androcles: to be paid quarterly.” He would be very welcome at Dewbank Hall to all, save one person. But while Mrs. Woodford senior is still alive the husband of her sister-in-law—although they are not a devoted couple—can never be received under that roof. Selina still dwells in Rhadegund Street with her beloved Woody, who, it is said, comports himself towards her far from dutifully. He often remarks (by no means in confidence) that she has conducted the business of Life in a very unsatisfactory manner—“My ma” (to use his exact expression) “has behaved like an old fool.”

Ernest Woodford's widow is, as we have said, yet living, if living that can be called which does not include motion. Her limbs are paralysed, and those white plump hands (for her mere bodily health has strangely improved) lie folded before her, which were wont to be so elegantly busy. She suffers no physical pain, and no longer touches opium; while her brain (fortunately or not for her, we dare not say) is clearer than it has been for years.

Charles and Evelyn are unremitting in their

attention to her ; and she always musters up a cheerful smile to welcome their presence : when her nephew comes to wish her good-night, as he does not fail to do every evening, she manages to whisper : “ Kiss me, Charlie.” It is late for the poor lady to begin to love her fellow-creatures ; but she has at last made a commencement with those two.

There are some very happy households in pastoral Cumberland, but it is allowed that Mr. and Mrs. Charles Woodford are the happiest couple in all the country-side. They are not a very youthful pair—the husband is thirty-six, the wife is twenty-eight—but, on the other hand, they fell in love with one another much earlier than usual. She was his “ little wife,” remember, twenty years ago. A union of this sort is very rare ; but where two people have been acquainted from childhood as intimately as brother and sister, it seems reasonable to suppose—neither having a fault or a virtue of which the other is not cognizant—that they should understand one another better than the young folk whose engagement has been, as is usual—only of a few months’ duration. They

cannot, at all events, complain of being deceived. It is a great and pleasant change for the poor folks about to get their old friend, Master Charlie, in place of the Black Squire; but Evelyn remains to them much the same, except that she has, of course, far greater opportunities for usefulness. The state of their aunt's health precludes the leaving Dewbank Hall for any prolonged period; indeed, they do not wish to do so. Sandalthwaite, endeared to them by a thousand recollections of early days, is their natural home.

A few years ago, however, when the great hero of Italy, the simple Farmer of Caprera, was received in London with such a Welcome as has never been paid by Englishmen even to one of their own nation, Valentine came up to town, by special agreement, to pay his loving homage to Giuseppe. That great man would, without doubt, have honoured Dewbank Hall with his presence, but for circumstances with which we are all acquainted. It is not so generally known that the first British baby to whom the hero stood godfather, by proxy (it was just before the unhappy affair of Aspromonte), was

one Garibaldi, the infant son of Charles and Evelyn Woodford, of Sandalthwaite, Cumberland.

There is not the slightest reason for suspecting *this* time (although Selina has her doubts) that the heir of Dewbank Hall is a supposititious child.

THE END.

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